OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER



SHOCK AND AWESOME

YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO THE FANTASTIC SAURUS BLASTER, SHOCK TROOPERS

SNES MINI HANDS ON



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DEPLOYING LASER SQUAD

JULIAN GOLLOP RETURNS TO HIS 8-BIT STRATEGY MASTERPIECE

THE HISTORY OF CHUCK ROCK

WE CHAT TO BOB CHURCHILL ABOUT CORE'S PREHISTORIC PLATFORMING SERIES



YOSHIAKI KOIZUMI ON CREATING NINTENDO'S SUN-SOAKED SEQUEL TO SUPER MARIO 64

PLUS

SATELLAVIEW
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KEY DEVELOPERS LOOK BACK AT THE GENRE AND GAMES THAT CREATED AN EMPIRE

Future
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THE RETROBATES

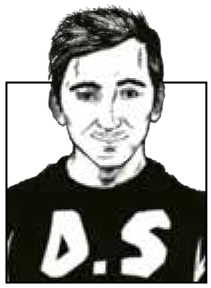
WHAT'S THE FIRST GAME YOU'LL PLAY ON THE SNES MINI



DARRAN JONES
It's going to be *Super Castlevania*. Constantly listening to the excellent Mondo soundtrack makes me want to complete it again.
Expertise:
Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine
Currently playing:
Metroid: Samus Returns
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



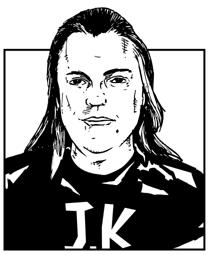
NICK THORPE
Earthbound would be my first choice – it's not like I'm ever going to get an original cartridge, after all.
Expertise:
Owning five Master Systems (I sold two)
Currently playing:
Night Trap: 25th Anniversary Edition
Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog



DREW SLEEP
I made a beeline for *Super Metroid* on the office's SNES Mini. Step aside, Mario, I only need Samus in my life.
Expertise:
Guardians, guns and Gjallarhorn
Currently playing:
Destiny 2
Favourite game of all time:
Final Fantasy VIII



SAM RIBBITS
Definitely *Yoshi's Island*. And when Nintendo makes a GBA Mini (affectionately known as the 'SNES Mini Mini'), it'll be the first game I play on that too!
Expertise:
Pixels
Currently playing:
Forza Horizon 3
Favourite game of all time:
Croc: Legend Of The Gobbos



JASON KELK
The first game I'd go for is probably *Contra III*, as that and *Mario Kart* are the games I sunk the most time into previously.
Expertise:
Being a homebrew hero
Currently playing:
Pastfinder
Favourite game of all time:
Io



GRAEME MASON
My boys are stoked for it, so we'll probably play *Super Mario World* first followed by a bit of *Super Mario Kart*.
Expertise:
Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently playing:
Dying Light
Favourite game of all time:
Resident Evil 4



DAVID CROOKES
I'd be straight into *Super Mario World*. It was the first game I played on the original SNES so memories and all that.
Expertise:
Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, Dizzy and PlayStation (but is it retro? Debate!)
Currently playing:
Darwinia
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



PAUL DRURY
After looking for *Pilotwings* and being disappointed, I'd go for *Star Fox 2* and see what we've been missing all these years.
Expertise:
Atari's MRB
Currently playing:
Uncharted: The Lost Legacy
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep in Space

LOADING...



I never even considered that the GameCube was the first home Nintendo system to launch without a traditional *Mario* game – I was too busy playing *Rogue Leader* and *Luigi's Mansion* to care. I was certainly excited about *Super Mario Sunshine*, though. How could I not be? It was the sequel to one of the best platformers of all time and Nintendo knew the genre inside out.

When it finally arrived less than six months later after the European GameCube launch it was everything I was hoping it would be. I'm therefore delighted that we've been able to secure an interview with Yoshiaki Koizumi who worked so hard to ensure that *Sunshine* was a worthy sequel to Nintendo's 64-bit platformer. With *Super Mario Odyssey* just around the corner, it feels like the perfect time to revisit Nintendo's platformer and hopefully Koizumi's anecdotes will convince you to dig out the game for one more play through.

And if you don't like Mario there's plenty more goodness to sink your teeth into, including a chat with Julian Gollop about his strategy masterpiece *Laser Squad*, a revealing interview with Atari's Rob Zdybel as well as the impact of Philip's CD-i.

Enjoy the magazine.





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>> Load 173 Breathing new life into classic games

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"Shock Troopers is a game that passed a lot of people by back in the day"





REVIEWS





ESSENTIALS





THE BOBCAT RETURNS

Accolade and its mascot return after two decades in the wilderness

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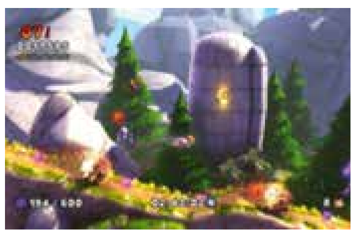
If you'd walked into our office on 1 January this year and told us that 2017 would be the year that *Bubsy* would make his glorious return, we'd have called you a madman – and not just because you'd walked into our office uninvited. Having said that, we'd have done the same to you if you'd said that *Shenmue III* was going to be announced in 2015, so it's clear that we need to start listening to home invaders and their unlikely, seemingly occult, retro gaming prophecies.

In any case, it's true – the wisecracking bobcat is back with more one-liners than ever before, and he's brought the long-defunct Accolade brand with him. Bubsy quickly became one of the more popular mascots of the 16-bit platformer boom after his debut in 1993 and even starred in a cartoon pilot. However, the crimes committed against gaming in the disastrous *Bubsy 3D* unfortunately turned the bobcat into a feline felon, and he's been waiting for the statute of limitations to expire ever since.

Bubsy: The Woolies Strike Back is due to be released on 31 October for PC and PS4, developed by Black Forest Games of Germany, a studio known for its platform games including the recent *Great Giana Sisters* games and *Rogue Stormers*. Wisely, the new game is designed to take after the character's more successful 2D side-scrolling outings. To find out more, we spoke to Edwin Chan of Billionsoft, the Hong Kong-based company behind the revival of Accolade.



» [PS4] That's a massive cache of yarn – the only problem is how to access it.



» [PS4] Gliding is one of *Bubsy*'s signature abilities, and it returns in *The Woolies Strike Back*.

What drew Billionsoft to revive the Accolade brand?
The brand had a really successful run in the Eighties and Nineties and even today is associated by gamers with fun, action and arcade-quality gaming. We've been waiting until a perfect fit project came along and *Bubsy: The Woolies Strike Back* fits its original brand to a T.

Why do you feel the time is right to bring back *Bubsy*?
We told Bubsy we were thinking of replacing him with a new character to drive his price down and it worked! Actually, Billionsoft acquired over 100 classic games a year ago and, based on our review, *Bubsy* was at the top in terms of ongoing interest by today's gamers. We did a test drive back in 2015 with a Greenlight campaign on Steam for a digital version of two older *Bubsy* SNES games and wound up being the number two in voting totals for the year.

Are any of the original *Bubsy* developers involved with *Bubsy: The Woolies Strike Back*?
No. We decided early on that we wanted to work with a developer that was well versed in current platformers



» [PS4] A yarn-powered UFO? It looks like a tough enemy for Bubsy to get his claws into…

> **"We think Black Forest did a great job with Giana Sister: Twisted Dreams"**
> Edwin Chan

and could produce a really strong and fun experience for *Bubsy* fans. We think Black Forest did a great job with *Giana Sisters: Twisted Dreams* and their knowledge and expertise clearly showed in their execution of the new *Bubsy* game. That said, the original team made a very memorable character that still feels very fresh by today's standards.

What are the key things you've aimed to keep from the previous *Bubsy* games?
Bubsy is definitely an everyman character and interacts with his worlds with a combination of excitement, intrepidation and horror – we kept all of that. Also, obviously, the genre had to stay the same. A horizontal platformer really keeps a player constantly engaged, a little like *American Ninja Warrior* or *Gladiators* in the UK, there's always another obstacle and it seems like it never ends.

What are the major new features players can expect to see?
Well Bubsy remains imperfect (we wouldn't have it any other way), but we've added a lot more waypoints, extra lives and tweaked some elements to make the journey a little less…errr, hmm, frustrating!



» [PS4] This boss appears to be giving Bubsy a hard time. He's still got his nice lives, though.

We noticed Bubsy seems to have hot and cold relationships with other game mascots on social media, was this intentional?
Did Sonic tell you to ask that? Wow, we thought this was a legit interview.

Are any other platforms being considered for the game?
Yes.

Can you tell us which ones?
Nope. Seriously, we're in talks right now, but nothing's ready to be announced.

Although releasing *The Woolies Strike Back* on the Sega Master System would be sweet!

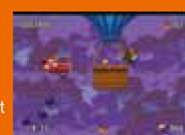
What other brands are you looking to revive in the future?
We already have several unannounced games in the pipeline for 2018 with more to come. Accolade is back… what could possibly go wrong! In all honestly, though, our back catalogue of classic games is something of a treasure trove and we are aiming to build something special here. *

THE STORY SO FUR

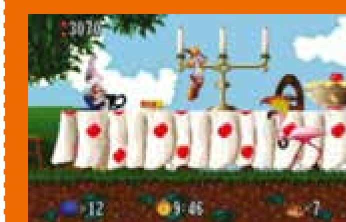
Bubsy racked up starring roles in the mid-Nineties – here's the lowdown…



Bubsy In Claws Encounters Of The Furred Kind, *1993*
The Woolies want to steal Earth's yarn supply, and, as a cat, Bubsy is having none of it. The result is a standard platformer in which our hero runs, jumps and glides through 16 levels, while constantly delivering one-liners. The game was fairly well received on both Mega Drive and SNES.



Bubsy II, *1994*
The bad guys have the Bubsy twins, and only one bobcat is bad enough to rescue them! Our protagonist gained a Nerf gun here, and the game adopted a non-linear design that allowed players to choose the order in which levels were played. It's generally considered to be better than the original.



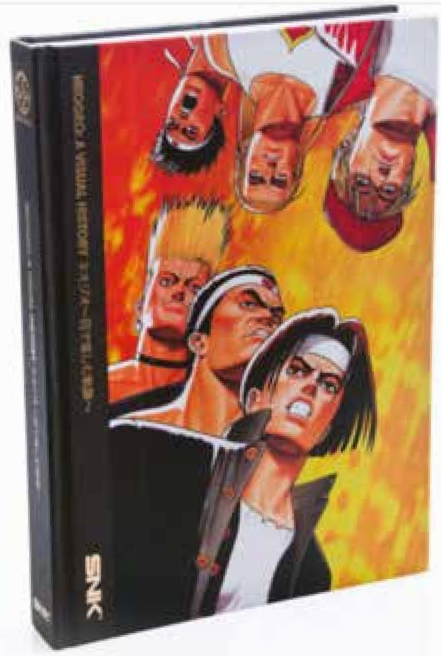
Bubsy In Fractured Furry Tales, *1994*
The third game in the series saw Bubsy attempting to fix the world's broken fairytales, including the likes of *Alice In Wonderland* and *Hansel And Gretel*. This game featured more complex level design and additional puzzle-solving elements, but is largely forgotten due to being an Atari Jaguar exclusive.



Bubsy 3D, *1996*
Bubsy's first and only 3D adventure saw him abducted by the Woolies, only to escape once they made it back to the Woolies' home planet Rayon. From there, his goal is to build a rocket to get home. The game is infamous for being a broken, ugly mess.

ADVANCED ENTERTAINMENT STORIES

SAM DYER ON HIS BRAND-NEW NEO-GEO BOOK



Sam Dyer's latest book is the result of a long-standing dream he's had. "Ever since I started Bitmap Books, I've always wanted to cover the Neo-Geo," he tells us. "I love game graphics and the Neo-Geo is arguably the pinnacle of Nineties pixel art. The only thing holding me back was that I have a knowledge gap with the whole Neo-Geo scene."

Fortunately, this didn't prove to be too much of a problem, as a surprise contact saw Sam well on the way to creating his desired book. "Out of the blue, I was approached by a chap called Frazer (@neogeocollector) about a year ago as he had seen our *Super Famicom: The Box Art Collection* book and wondered if Bitmap Books was up for collaborating on a Neo-Geo equivalent," Sam recalls. "We got chatting, the idea grew, and it eventually evolved into more of a complete history book rather than purely box art. The icing on the cake was getting an official licence from SNK, which has opened up so many more possibilities. After six months of research, I no longer have a knowledge gap with the Neo-Geo!

For those of you that are familiar with Sam's lavish books, you might be surprised to learn that he didn't go down the Kickstarter route, as is typical with these types of books, instead launching it as a separate product. We were keen to know why he made this decision. "At the beginning it was a necessity as I was an unknown publisher. Outside of the visual compendiums, I've tended to not use Kickstarter for a few reasons. Firstly, because I'm conscious of launching too many projects on Kickstarter and over-saturating my fanbase. There's also the added royalty costs that come with doing licensed books, which when added to Kickstarter's commission, mean certain projects are not viable for crowdfunding."

Even though Sam's approach to releasing the book is slightly different, it looks very similar to his earlier releases, albeit with a few neat twists. "The Neo-Geo book also adds written sections such as a complete history of the Neo-Geo from past to present (written by *Edge* launch editor, Steve Jarratt) and interviews with current SNK staff," reveals Sam. "We've tried to cover every aspect of the Neo-Geo's history but all the while, keeping everything very visual. The book is also the largest that we have ever produced, weighing in at 400 pages, A4 in size and hardback."

Of course, the real draw of Sam's book for Neo-Geo fans is that it's officially licensed. As a result Sam has been able to fill his tome with some incredible imagery and numerous fascinating anecdotes. "For a company that has passed hands many times, SNK have got a surprising amount of assets and pretty much everything we've asked for, they'd have in high resolution," he continues. "Most exciting for me has been the artworks by legendary artists such as Shinkiro. I love seeing these artworks that would normally be on the game boxes with logos but SNK have a great archive of his raw artwork. There are a few things in the book that have not been seen before and some other things that are less common. I think there will be a few parts in the history that people weren't aware of which have been uncovered during our research. The book also contains the most accurate and complete master games list in the world. Each game's release is catalogued including their respective release dates."

We know why Sam has made his book, but why does he think the system remains so popular, many years after its release? "I think ultimately it's the quality of the games that have stood the test of time," he concludes. "SNK still release them, most recently on the Nintendo Switch, and they are still popular. I also think that there's an element of mystique around the Neo-Geo. As kids, not many of us could afford one, so as an adult, being able to eventually have the system and play the games is a cool thing." *

Visit bitmapbooks.co.uk for more information



ANDY REMIC INTERVIEW, RG172

In issue 172 we included a quote from *Memoirs Of A Spectrum Addict* director Andy Remic which stated, "I'd read about *Bedrooms To Billions*, and how it wasn't 'broadcast standard'". We're happy to clarify that *From Bedrooms To Billions* is indeed broadcast standard, and will, in fact, air on terrestrial TV in the near future.



NINTENDO SWITCH
ANYTIME, ANYWHERE, WITH ANYONE
Nintendo
THE BRAND NEW MARIO ADVENTURE THAT YOU CAN PLAY ANYWHERE!
SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY
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7
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Join Mario on a massive, globe-trotting 3D adventure and use his incredible new abilities to collect Moons so you can power up your airship, the Odyssey, and rescue Princess Peach from Bowser's wedding plans.

Here's my bio… Paul Rose
Paul Rose is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator and chief writer of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes for kids TV, but can still be found rambling on about games, old and new, for his daily website, Digitiser2000.com.

Giddy With Excitement

Super Mario Odyssey, then. It's almost here, and I can't quite remember the last time I was this sweaty and excited for a brand-new game.

Maybe *Half-Life 2*. And that's a big maybe. To find another one you've got to go back even further, to the mid-Nineties.

You know I'm talking about *Super Mario 64*, right? Of course you do. You were there too, in between choking to death on a Tamagotchi, and practicing kissing with your Big Mouth Billy Bass, and getting your hair cut exactly like Kevin out of *Home Alone*.

Super Mario 64 felt like gaming was suddenly leaping forward ten generations at once. I recall seeing the early screenshots of *Super Mario 64* for the first time, and almost not believing what I was seeing. It was crazy! The only other time I'd felt that same head-spinning buzz was when I was reading a preview of *Knight Lore* for my lovely ZX Spectrum.

While I would argue that both games were flawed – the inevitable consequence of doing something so unprecedented – they still somehow lived up to expectations. They made that leap, and somehow made it work. From there, it was easy enough to overlook any imperfections.

It's fair to say that Virtual Reality, as fun as it can be – providing it doesn't make you want to throw up inside the helmet (like it does me) – hasn't quite arrived with the same levels of cultural shock. Some would like us to believe that it has, but, frankly, VR games are just the same sorts of games we've had for a while… except a little more vomit-y.

Super Mario 64 was like nothing before. Like, at all. Oh, *Tomb Raider* was floating around, with Lara Croft on her way to becoming a cultural icon, but it lacked the everyone-is-welcome accessibility of *Mario*.

Indeed, the game was also like nothing since, too – it remains a strange and unique signpost to the future. The excitement I felt for it has never entirely left me. I'm not kidding myself that *Super Mario Odyssey* will have a similar sort of impact, but when I watch it in action, I'm getting that same feeling of butterflies inside me. It's hard to describe it exactly… it's similar to the feeling you get just before a big holiday; you're going somewhere new, going to have new experiences, and you'll return changed.

And that was what *Mario 64* did to gamers, and the games industry as a whole. It changed us all – it raised the bar of our expectations, and it changed the industry. In the wake of *Mario 64*, everyone was forced to play catch-up.

I said it was hard to describe the feeling I had for *Super Mario 64*, which still lives on inside me, but I think it has just hit me. It's love; it's that feeling you get when you first fall for someone, then impossible potential of a new relationship, and the surprise when – at least for a time – it lives up to that impossible dream. ★



Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

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7
www.pegi.info
Splatoon 2
9/10 METRO
"one of the best online shooters ever made"
RECOMMENDED
"one of Nintendo's finest games in years"
9/10 Nintendo Insider
"an unbeatable multiplayer experience"
10/10 NintendoLife
"continues Nintendo's trailblazing first year of Switch stunners"
NEW WEAPONS
NEW STAGES
NEW TOWN
RENEWED SPECIAL WEAPONS
NINTENDO SWITCH
ANYTIME...
ANYWHERE...
WITH ANYONE!





Andy Roberts

Learn how Kickstarter is being used to resurrect the classic Thalamus brand

If you were a Commodore 64 fan you'll be well aware of Thalamus Publishing. It was initially created as an in-house software publishing label for Newsfield Publications Ltd and predominantly focused on the Commodore 64 with games such as *Armalyte, Quedex* and *Sanxion*. The label has now been resurrected and the first game – a remaster of *Hunter's Moon* — is currently running on Kickstarter. Andy Roberts was keen to tell us more about his plans for the classic brand.

Why resurrect Thalamus now?
I don't think there's ever been a better time to bring the company and the brand back, especially as the C64 seems to be experiencing something of a renaissance. The plans have actually been on the drawing board for about five years, but it was the recent influx of quality new releases from companies such as RGCD, Psytronik, Pond Software, and Protovision that convinced me to finally put those plans into action.



» [C64] We love *Armalyte* so we're keen to have how an eventual remaster will turn out.

How tricky has it been acquiring rights to the name?
Typically it's an extremely slow and expensive process, especially when older companies are bought, sold or merged. Thankfully, many of the rights were acquired many moons ago via Newsfield's liquidators. I recall them telling me that some poor junior member of staff had to clamber over mountains of boxes in the warehouse to find the right paperwork.

How will you be using Kickstarter?
Kickstarter serves a number of purposes: firstly, it allows us to secure funding for the project up-front which not only allows us to get the project completed much more quickly, it also gives us the resources to bring in additional people – such as graphics guru Robin Levy and musician Matt Gray – to help turn the game into something really special.

Secondly, it's a really great way to connect with backers and get their feedback both during and after the campaign, particularly when it comes to choosing stretch goals and additional perks. In fact, the campaign includes a 'Beta Pledge', allowing a handful of lucky backers to get a behind the scenes look at the remastering process, have some creative input and play early versions of the game.

What will happen if the Kickstarter campaign fails?
Obviously, it's important to consider all Kickstarter outcomes and, naturally, there's a Plan B in place to bring the project to fruition – it might just take a little longer than anticipated. That said, the *Remastered Collection* is just once facet of Thalamus' future plans, so the likelihood is that we'd shift focus to something else and work on the remastered games in the background.

HUNTER'S MOON REMASTERED IS ON KICKSTARTER. FIND OUT MORE AT **WWW.BIT.LY/HUNTERSMOONKICK**



» [C64] *Hunter's Moon* is celebrating its 30th anniversary making it the perfect game to launch Andy's new campaign.

What sort of games can we expect to see from Thalamus on the Spectrum Next?
The current plan is to convert a number of the Thalamus games to the Spectrum Next, taking full advantage of the machine's enhanced hardware features. For that added touch of nostalgia, however, you will also be able to toggle the graphics between original Speccy mode and enhanced Spectrum Next mode.

Beyond that, it all depends on how the Next fares when the machines are delivered, but if the demand is there we'll support it.

How many of the original developers are involved?
From the outset I wanted to make sure that we had the blessing and co-operation of the original developers; it's all too easy to overlook the fact that developers poured their heart and soul into these games for months or years at a time; they have an emotional stake in these products, and I think it's important to respect that.

Personally, the most important aspect of the *Remastered Collection* is that the original development teams will receive the lion's share of royalties on every cartridge sold. I think a lot of developers have been short-changed throughout the years, and that has never sat well with me, so these remastered games are an opportunity to redress the balance. *



ATARI KARTS
"This is certainly getting rarer and harder to find, but a fun game that shows off the Jag nicely. I was glad to finally cross this off the list!"
PAID: £100

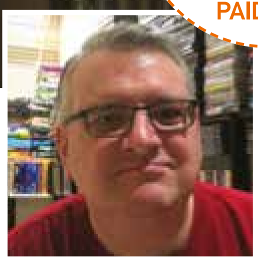
JEWEL IN THE CROWN

ULTIMATE THE COLLECTED WORKS

"Eleven of the finest games ever made in one highly desirable and collectible compilation. It is hard to track down now in working order with all the original contents and worth 50 times what it cost me"
PAID: £2

THE PAWN
"Probably my favourite text adventure ever, it broke the mould for the genre and is a must play classic. My copy is absolutely minty fresh too!"
PAID: £15

BATTLE WHEELS
"If you want a that game shows off the power of the Lynx, you can't go wrong with this offering from Beyond Games"
PAID: £20



A Broad Hoard

Readers take us through the retro keyhole

BIO

NAME:
Steven Leicester

ESTIMATED VALUE:
£10K

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Atari ST

FAVOURITE GAME:
The Secret Of Monkey Island

"HALF THE FUN OF COLLECTING IS IN THE CHASE. IN A WAY IT WILL BE A SHAME WHEN I HAVE COMPLETED SOME OF THEM!"

Many collectors restrict themselves to one company, or one specific system for their retro kicks. But sometimes it's more fun to mix things up a little bit and collect across multiple formats and time periods, as is the case with Steven Leicester. Finding himself becoming ever more disillusioned with the latest 'triple-A' offerings and their huge 'day-one' patches, Steven first got back into retro gaming in a big way three years ago when he started the bulk of his collection. "I found myself longing for the days of when you got the full game," explains Steven, before adding, "I was fed up with endless downloadable content, locked content and microtransactions." Starting with the system he's loved the most since first getting one back in the late Eighties, the Atari ST, Steven tells us why he loves the 16-bit computer so much, "It's a much misunderstood and, in my opinion anyway, unfairly maligned machine. It's great for amassing a huge collection with little outlay, as the games tend to cost a lot less than their Amiga counterparts, and there aren't quite as many Atari ST collectors out there, thankfully."

From there, Steven picked up some of the other machines he owned in his youth, such as the ZX Spectrum, Atari Lynx, Sega Mega Drive and Xbox. Like many, he then moved on to systems he had never experienced, especially those from Nintendo. "I never ever had a Nintendo system back in the day," he ponders, "so being able to pick up a SNES for peanuts with all the classic games, and experience them for the first time has been an absolute joy." His current collection goals are to finally complete his Atari Lynx, original Xbox and Atari Jaguar collections. We asked Steven what keeps him in the hunt, "Half the fun of collecting is in the chase, looking on Facebook groups and eBay for those last few elusive games you need for a full set. In a way, it will be a shame when I have completed some of them! I only need a couple more titles for the Atari systems and six more for the Xbox. After that, I plan to flesh out my ZX Spectrum collection a little more." In Steven's opinion, the beauty of collecting across multiple systems is you get to sample the very best each has to offer and can also see the progression games have made over the years in key genres. But what is Steven's favourite genre, we hear you ask? "I've always loved classic text adventures on the 8-bit systems, and from there you can see how they evolved into the early LucasArts graphic adventures and onto the fully-fledged RPG epic's we have today, such as *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*: which, for me, is the best game to be released in the last few years." *

CUSTOM HANDMADE CLAY DIZZY
"This was made to my exact request by Tibbers Workshop. Tweet them @TibbersWorkshop to get one yourself of any character you love!"
PAID: £35



BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

SEPTEMBER 2000 – Greasy grapplers, Gordon Freeman and yet more bloody Pokémon – these were the things that were getting gamers excited as the kids went back to school. Let's hop in the retro machine





NEWS SEPTEMBER 2000

The haulage industry and other associated concerns initiated a blockade of UK oil refineries and terminals on 8 September, in order to protest the high cost of petrol. Due to a combination of high taxation and a spike in worldwide oil prices, the price of fuel had risen dramatically over preceding years. The protest had a major impact, closing thousands of petrol stations and causing problems for supermarkets, schools, hospitals and public transport. The government eventually had to deploy military tankers and offer police escorts to regular tankers to ensure that deliveries were made. The protests peaked on 14 September, reducing major road traffic by 25 per cent, and began to wind down on 16 September.

On 30 September 2000, the UK government closed HM Prison Maze, the infamous institution that housed paramilitary prisoners in Northern Ireland. The prison, which housed both republicans and loyalists, was the site of a number of infamous incidents over the years due to the British government's refusal to classify the inmates as political prisoners. These included the dirty protest of the late Seventies, Bobby Sands' hunger strike in 1981, and the escape of 38 prisoners in 1983 – the United Kingdom's largest ever prison break.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM SEPTEMBER 2000

Do you have sufficient olfactory capability to detect the aroma of Dwayne Johnson's culinary endeavours? That was the question on everyone's lips, as The Rock – then in his fifth reign as WWF champion – graced the pages of just about every gaming magazine. PlayStation owners were anxiously awaiting the arrival of *WWF Smackdown 2*, the sequel to the hit game released in March 2000. This game would introduce new wrestlers such as Hall Of Fame members Kurt Angle, Eddie Guerrero and Rikishi, as well as the villainous Right To Censor stable. A variety of new modes were also on the way including table matches, ladder matches, casket matches and the dreaded 'Hell In A Cell' cage match.

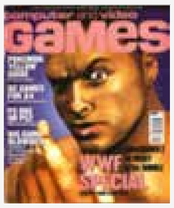
Grappling games were making their way to other consoles, as the Nintendo 64 was getting *WWF No Mercy* and the Dreamcast received *WWF Royal Rumble*. The Nintendo game drew attention due to its comprehensive career mode, allowing players to take part in long-term feuds, and extensive 'Create A Wrestler' features. *N64 Magazine* felt that "The N64's only a few months away from the ultimate wrestling experience," while *CVG* cautioned that it was, "Not a huge step on from *WWF Wrestlemania 2000*, but there are enough new features and improvements to make you want to don the lycra one more time." The game on Sega's platform was a straight arcade conversion, with fewer wrestlers and modes than the games on the older machines. It did have one major advantage, though – up to nine wrestlers in the ring at any one time, making for a more authentic portrayal of the *Royal Rumble* match itself.

One Dreamcast game that couldn't be accused of lacking in features was the conversion of PC hit *Half-Life*, which was the cover story for *Dreamcast Magazine*. While developer Gearbox couldn't confirm any online features, it was happy to reveal the new *Blue Shift* expansion in which you took control of Black Mesa security guard Barney instead of Gordon Freeman. The home conversion also offered improved visuals, to the point that the magazine claimed, "To say that *Half-Life* on Dreamcast is a huge improvement over the PC version would be a hideous understatement." It was certainly impressive, and Martin Mathers wrote that, "Being among the first to play the world-renowned *Half-Life* on Dreamcast is one of those experiences that you tend to get rather



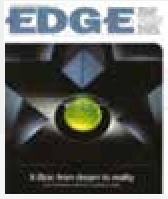
[PC] A tense standoff highlights the divisions that ravage the world of *Deus Ex*.

THIS MONTH IN…



Computer & Video Games

"Here, for the first time anywhere, are the images that were deemed too shocking for the games playing public to see," declared a feature on controversial game adverts. Those images were of pigs fornicating to promote *Hogs Of War*. The same feature also included a topless woman holding a Mega Drive pad.



Edge

The tricky task of localisation was under the spotlight this month. "Infogrames has reported that one of its driving games saw an increase in sales of more than 20 per cent in Australia just because the in-game music was altered from dance to hard rock," the feature claimed. Did Fear Factory really draw that kind of money? We're not sure.



Arcade

A news feature this month assured us that the growth of internet-enabled mobile phones was the future of gaming as an industry: "As sales continue to escalate, and WAP phones become the standard, everyone from your friends to your mum and dad will be playing." Hmm, all of this sounds a bit far-fetched, don't you think?



[Nintendo 64] Catching a Pidgey gang attack on Meowth will greatly please Professor Oak.



[Dreamcast] Something is terribly wrong with Tim Henman here, as his shadow has completely disappeared.

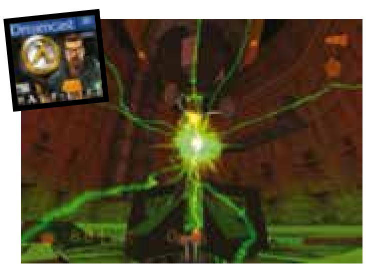
excited about." Surely this would be an unmissable game.

Leaving the future aside, the must-have game of the month was *Deus Ex*, a game which *Edge* rightly claimed as having defied all attempts at pigeonholing – it blended first-person shooting with exceptionally strong RPG elements as well as bits of stealth. Cast as augmented human JC Denton, the player was given an enormous amount of freedom in completing objectives and interacting with other characters. "How you handle the stark moral wildcards thrown up by the conflict affects people's reactions to you, as well as the future missions you receive," *Edge* noted in its glowing 9/10 review. *Arcade* was similarly impressed – in a 5/5 review, Nick Jones claimed that, "It's better than any other first-person game you care to mention. Only *Half-Life* can claim to be a rival but that hasn't got the same kind of replay value."

Wimbledon might have passed, but Sega had served up *Virtua Tennis* and it was receiving all kinds of love. The excellent arcade conversion offered a simple control system, but featured more than enough subtleties to sort the grand slam winners from the leisure centre loafers. It also hosted a set of minigames meant to improve your skills in the World Tour mode. "In multiplayer it ranks as one of the best sports games of all time," opined *CVG*'s critic in a 4/5 review, while Edge's 8/10 review called it, "The genre's most accomplished example to date."

N64 owners once again had their Pokéballs out, this time for the photography spin-off *Pokémon Snap*. Players could explore a variety of locations on rails and attempt to take the most beautiful pictures of the colourful critters, with special items that allowed you to entice or annoy them for better shots. The offbeat concept worked surprisingly well – N64 Magazine offered it 80%, with the main complaint being that not every Pokémon was represented, while *Arcade* gave it 4/5.

Over on the PlayStation, the hot new game was Square's *Parasite Eve 2* – an odd release, given the lack of a UK release for the first game. Aya Brea returned as an FBI operative engaged in suppression of mutant creatures, but the gameplay shifted from the original thanks to the inclusion of real-time battles. *CVG* felt it was "actually better than any PS *Resi* game", and awarded it the full 5/5, one mark above *Arcade*'s 4/5 verdict. Other notable PlayStation games this month included *TOCA*



[Dreamcast] *Half-Life* on the Dreamcast would never see store shelves, maybe G-Man nicked it.

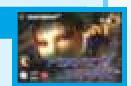
World Touring Cars (5/5, *Arcade*) and *Vib Ribbon* (4/5 *CVG*, 4/5 *Arcade*).

But what of Sony's new wonder console? *Edge*'s main news story spoke of worrying times ahead for the PlayStation 2 – developers were apparently split on the machine and software sales in Japan had decreased below hardware sales levels, suggesting that many buyers of the system were picking it up to use as a cheap DVD player. But Lorne Lanning of Oddworld Inhabitants wasn't surprised by that: "Just look at the titles that have been released. They were far from impressive relative to public expectations of the system." Ouch. *

CHARTS

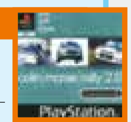
SEPTEMBER 2000

NINTENDO 64



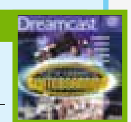
1 Perfect Dark (Nintendo)
2 Pokémon Stadium (Nintendo)
3 The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time (Nintendo)
4 Turok: Rage Wars (Acclaim)
5 Track & Field 2000 (Konami)

PLAYSTATION



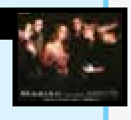
1 Colin McRae Rally 2.0 (Codemasters)
2 WWF Smackdown (THQ)
3 Driver (Infogrames)
4 In Cold Blood (Sony)
5 World Championship Snooker (Codemasters)

DREAMCAST



1 Tony Hawk's Skateboarding (Crave)
2 Resident Evil: Code Veronica (Eidos)
3 Wacky Races (Infogrames)
4 Ecco The Dolphin (Sega)
5 Crazy Taxi (Sega)

MUSIC



1 Against All Odds (Mariah Carey feat Westlife)
2 Kernkraft 400 (Zombie Nation)
3 Lady (Hear Me Tonight) (Modjo)
4 Something Deep Inside (Billie Piper)
5 Most Girls (Pink)



» RETROREVIVAL

Gyruss

RETRO IS BETTER, OBVIOUSLY

» ARCADE » KONAMI » 1983

For me, *Gyruss* is one of those games that proves that there's more to retro gaming than just nostalgia. I completely missed *Gyruss* when I was growing up – I never saw it in an arcade, and had no contact with the various home conversions. By the time I finally discovered it a decade ago, the game was already well over 20 years old.

The age of the game didn't matter to me, though, because I was looking for specific qualities. I'd recently picked up a copy of *Tempest X3* for the PlayStation and I was looking for other similarly-designed shooting games, which led me to investigate the likes of *N2O*, *Internal Section* and, of course, *Gyruss*. Konami's game certainly wasn't as complex as *Tempest X3* – ultimately, it's basically *Galaga* in a tube – but it was certainly satisfying thanks to the twitch shooting action and a soundtrack that got the heart racing. Those were the things I was really looking for, and modern games just weren't delivering.

Thankfully, things are better now. Later that year we got *Space Giraffe* from Jeff Minter himself, and today's indie boom has brought about a resurgence of quick arcade-style games. But it's easy to forget that there was a time not too long ago when games like *Gyruss* were completely out of fashion, and the only way to get the kind of experience I wanted was to go back to the past. The simple truth is that they really weren't making 'em like they used to. *



AFTER REVOLUTIONISING 3D GAMING WITH SUPER MARIO 64, NINTENDO HAD THE UNENVIABLE TASK OF DELIVERING A WORTHY SUCCESSOR. NICK THORPE TALKS TO YOSHIAKI KOIZUMI TO FIND OUT HOW HIS TEAM DELIVERED ITS SUN-DRENCHED SEQUEL…



» [GameCube] This poor Chain Chomp is very hot, so Mario has to cool it down with FLUDD.

» [GameCube] Other areas of the island can be seen from a distance in backgrounds, like Pinna Park and Ricco Harbour here.





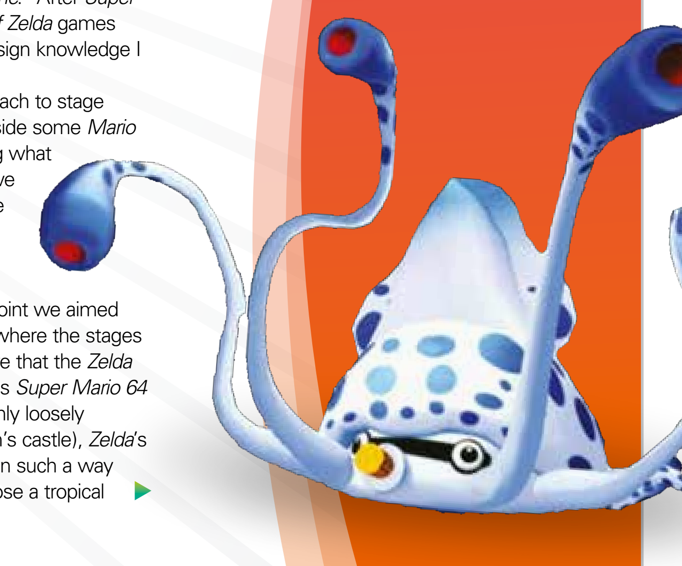
» [GameCube] You can clear goop from above using FLUDD's hover nozzle – just don't fall into it!

"We felt that setting the game somewhere other than the Mushroom Kingdom would give us new ideas" Yoshiaki Koizumi

Sometimes, no matter how much you respect Nintendo, you wouldn't want to actually work there – thanks to its successes, there's an enormous weight of expectation attached to whatever the company does. Take *Mario*, for example: having delivered one of the best games of all time in the form of *Super Mario Bros. 3*, the company had to deliver a next-gen sequel worthy of the series for the SNES. It succeeded with *Super Mario World*, landing it in the same situation again – and the company still managed to deliver the goods. In fact, *Super Mario 64* was arguably more impressive than *Super Mario World*, as Nintendo had to master 3D game design and did it first time. So sure enough, when the GameCube made its way to market, Nintendo found itself in a familiar predicament once again.

How do you improve on a game that revolutionised an industry? The thrill of *Super Mario 64* was in the introduction of 3D environments, and the way in which Mario interacted with them. The team at Nintendo EAD would have to tackle both of those aspects of the game, and they chose to start with the environments. "I wanted to create expansive stages that would be worth exploring," says Yoshiaki Koizumi, who worked as the director of *Super Mario Sunshine*. "After *Super Mario 64*, I worked on *The Legend Of Zelda* games and I wanted to use the 3D game design knowledge I picked up from them in a *Mario* title."

This meant taking a different approach to stage design, even to the point of setting aside some *Mario* traditions. "When we were visualising what kind of world we'd want to explore, we felt that setting the game somewhere other than the Mushroom Kingdom – as we'd normally do – would give us some new ideas that we could make use of," explains Koizumi. "Another point we aimed for was to create a seamless space, where the stages are linked together by terrain." It's here that the *Zelda* influence becomes obvious – whereas *Super Mario 64* featured a series of abstract stages only loosely connected by a hub (that being Peach's castle), *Zelda*'s 3D environments are interconnected in such a way as to feel like a cohesive world. "I chose a tropical ▶





island as the setting, making it somewhere that was rich in variety and also could feel like somewhere you'd want to go yourself," explains Koizumi. "I wanted to create a game where you could feel like you were sightseeing on holiday."

The result was Delfino Island, a new setting for the *Mario* series, shaped like and named after a dolphin in tribute to the development codename for the GameCube. The usual platform game tropes didn't apply here as everything had to be on-theme, meaning that there was no room for slippery ice worlds. All of the locations on Delfino Island are themed around things that you would expect to see at a resort – public tourist attractions, like an amusement park, a beach and a hotel, as well as the more functional locations including villages and a harbour. Likewise, the Mushroom Kingdom's inhabitants weren't to be found in abundance. Instead, Mario would interact with the inhabitants of the island, the palm tree-headed Piantas and the shell-wearing Nokis.

Delfino Island made for a beautiful setting, but it wasn't one that instantly lent itself to a particular style of game. In fact, while a platform game seems like the most logical successor to *Super Mario 64*, Koizumi recalls the team looking in different directions to begin with. "When we were making prototypes, we were exploring the idea of a disaster recovery mission-style game. We experimented with a lot of different things before we switched over to making it a platform action game," the director explains. "It was a challenge coming up with ways to include new elements (like having people) without it seeming odd."



» [GameCube] Mario isn't entirely reliant on the FLUDD, he can still jump, slide and pound the ground.



» [GameCube] Abstract backgrounds and floating platforms? Yup, this can only be a secret stage.

Wait, "people" in a Mario game? That's right – and you can see this for yourself. When the game was revealed at Nintendo's Spaceworld show in 2001, a trailer was shown in which a young girl is seen in the background. The game was also set to use a new form of coin, the Sol Coin, which could be spent – something not usually done with the coins of the Mushroom Kingdom. A clue as to what they could be spent on lies in the unused data on the game disc, which contains messages relating to a train system that Mario could purchase tickets for. This doesn't appear in the final game, as Mario instead travels via warp points, like in *Mario 64*.

In fact, examining this first trailer is fascinating, because very little of what is shown in it made it to the final game. The island setting, Mario's moves and

BRIGHTEST SHINES

There are 120 Shines to collect in Super Mario Sunshine – these are five of the most memorable...



GLOOPER BLOOPER BREAKS OUT

RICCO HARBOUR

■ This is a memorable and pretty early boss fight. Our big inky friend wants to spray his goop everywhere, so Mario needs to use FLUDD to clean it up. Then he'll need to pull off the Blooper's tentacles one by one (how violent!), before tugging at its mouth in order to deal damage.



EELY-MOUTH'S DENTIST

RICCO HARBOUR

■ There's horrible pollution all over Eely-Mouth's teeth, and it's Mario's job (now dabbling in dentistry) to give them a good pressure clean. How? First you need to dive into the polluted waters of Noki Bay, then use the hover nozzle to blast water downwards. Just be sure not to drown...

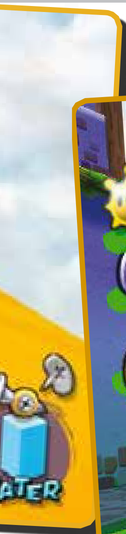


THE SECRET PACHINKO BOARD

DELFINO PLAZA

■ There's a boat in Delfino Plaza, which passes under a bridge before leaving for the wide open sea. Jump up into the bridge and you'll warp your way to this giant pachinko board. Mario himself is the ball here, and the plucky crimson-capped hero requires some guidance to collect the eight red coins here.

> "When we were making prototypes, we were exploring the idea of a disaster recovery mission-style game" Yoshiaki Koizumi





» [GameCube] Clearing goop off of pollution-spewing enemies is a remnant of an earlier concept.



the pollution theme are all more or less correct, but the maps and enemies on show never made it to the final game. Reports at the time state that Shigeru Miyamoto was opposed to the idea of having shown *Super Mario Sunshine* at Spaceworld 2001, such was the early state it was in, and had to be persuaded heavily in order to do so. But other than the obvious aspects of that trailer, there was one object that didn't go unnoticed but couldn't be explained. It was the presence of an odd backpack device on Mario that raised eyebrows at that event, and Nintendo was keeping its significance a secret at that time. The press described it as being like a jetpack, not knowing just how right they might be. With the benefit of hindsight, the presence of this device was proof that the early ideas were already giving way to something that was much closer to the final game design.

Mario's new tool was FLUDD – the Flash Liquidiser Ultra Dousing Device, according to its inventor Professor E Gadd. The device could rapidly store and discharge water, allowing it to perform a variety of functions of both offensive and defensive utility. "We thought that making playing with water the theme of the game would make this tropical world even more fun," Koizumi recalls. It was certainly a shrewd move, as Mario gained a family-friendly weapon. What's more, on a tropical island setting there should have been plenty of thematically appropriate opportunities to work water sources into stage design.

"In an early prototype, the player wasn't searching for Shine Sprites, and instead the story was set on an island that was slowly being polluted by enemies," Koizumi reveals. "The idea was that you'd wash the pollution away with FLUDD and also use it to defeat the boss enemy, the source of the pollution." Looking at the very first trailer for the game, you can see this idea in action – enemies spreading pollution are clearly present, and there's a gigantic enemy roaming about the place. But, as familiar as this sounds, such gameplay only makes up a portion of what's actually in *Super Mario Sunshine*. "A part of this was left in the game in the form of cleaning off graffiti to defeat enemies, or save people," says Koizumi. "Ultimately we decided to switch the theme to the platforming action you see now, and when we did so, we removed some of the FLUDD abilities and whittled them down to four."

Cutting back on FLUDD's functions might not have been a bad idea, as the device certainly takes a major role in *Super Mario Sunshine*. In fact, in a weird way, it's possible to describe FLUDD as the star of the ▶





THE SECRET OF THE VILLAGE UNDERSIDE

PIANTA VILLAGE

■ This task reveals a whole different side to the village – you'll need to get underneath it with Yoshi to find the entrance to a secret stage. Once you're there, Shadow Mario will steal FLUDD, and you'll rely on strong Piantas to throw you between platforms.



THE SAND BIRD IS BORN

GELATO BEACH

■ Don't you know about the bird? Everybody knows about the bird. If you can make your way into the broken egg in the tower on Gelato Beach, you'll be transported to atop the Sand Bird. Your goal is to collect eight red coins without falling off, which is harder than it sounds as it occasionally decides to rotate 90 degrees.

HYDRO HEAVEN

Super Mario Sunshine just wouldn't be the same without FLUDD, the versatile water cannon that gave Mario some new moves





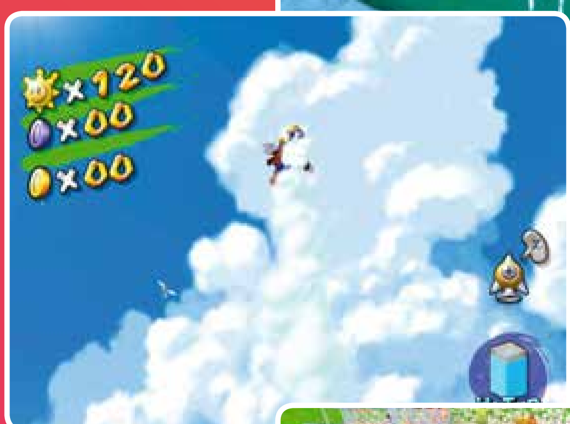
SQUIRT NOZZLE

■ Your standard hose or water pistol attachment, which is necessary in a wide variety of situations – you'll clean graffiti, extinguish fires and fill containers with this attachment. Pressing the Y button will put your viewpoint behind Mario's shoulder, enabling you to aim more accurately when targeting tricky enemies.



HOVER NOZZLE

■ Though you can use these twin downward jets to attack from above, their most common use is as a pseudo-jetpack that can keep Mario aloft for a few seconds after a jump. If you're using this to clean graffiti, make sure you pull backwards just before your jets cut out, or you'll land smack-bang in the goop.



ROCKET NOZZLE

■ When triple jumps, spin jumps and even wall jumps can't get you where you need to go, build up some water pressure and then let it off for an almighty blast into the sky. This will easily let you to leap tall buildings. There are limitations, though - you can't blast off while swimming.



TURBO NOZZLE

■ Using the force of FLUDD's tank being discharged at high pressure, Mario can run fast and even jet through water – like when people strap fire extinguishers to wheelchairs. It's a surprisingly sustained effect and Mario is pretty hard to handle, but it does let him stick two fingers up at old rival Sonic.



» [GameCube] Delfino Plaza is a stunning location, especially as the GameCube has the power to draw it all in one screen.

▶ show in *Super Mario Sunshine*. Many of the game's objectives involved using FLUDD to clean up graffiti and pollution, and the four new moves that Mario gains would be impossible without it. FLUDD was even given some screen time as a character – thanks to the artificial intelligence bestowed upon it by Professor E Gadd, FLUDD could actually talk. But the addition of the device didn't come without problems.

"The difficulty of jumping onto platforms has been an issue in 3D platforming games since *Super Mario 64*. To ease the problem, users could use FLUDD to shoot water downwards so they could fall down as if they were experiencing low gravity," says Koizumi. "We put a limit on the amount of water available, and it was actually a lot of work for us to place water sources!" The need to incorporate water sources is one which is usually cleverly dealt with – you can see how the team has included fountains and puddles and even an indoor swimming pool in locations throughout the game. However, sometimes even this isn't enough, and the game rewards you with a water bottle for defeating an enemy. It's an inelegant solution, but one which proves necessary given the constraints imposed by the design.

Luckily, the level design as a whole was something that Nintendo had a better idea of how to handle. The biggest advantage of the GameCube hardware was that it could render larger and more complex game worlds, and Koizumi and his team relished the chance to work with them. "With the extra space in the stages, we were able to set up shortcuts by preparing jump platforms to make it easy to get around, and



» [GameCube] The scale of some enemies in *Super Mario Sunshine* is terrifying – look at this Big Wiggler!



build the stages so users were free to choose their own route to move through them – for example, by running around on the roofs of buildings and so on," says Koizumi. This recognises one of the fundamental joys of *Super Mario 64*, which was seeing how you could get into odd places – for example, on top of Peach's castle in the hub world. Nintendo rewarded that exploratory spirit in *Super Mario 64*, and it would do so again in *Super Mario Sunshine* – even in the hub world. While some of the level entrances in Delfino Plaza are nice, ground-level portals, there's more to discover – you've got to find a warp pipe on top of a building to get to Sirena Beach, for example.

"We designed the stages so that not only did they have a main goal, but you could also reach subcourses" *Yoshiaki Koizumi*

However, there was a danger that players would fail to map out the new, larger spaces in their heads – one that the team was fully aware of. "When designing open stages, you have to consider that if the player doesn't have a way to tell where they are in the stage, they can easily get lost," Koizumi tells us. "In *Super Mario Sunshine*, we put large landmarks in the stages, so players could move around using those as indicators of their position." With that concern dealt with, the team was free to populate these larger stages with fun things to do. "We decided to create multiple missions that took advantages of the space," Koizumi continues. "We designed the stages so that not only did they have a main goal, but you could also reach sub courses, and of course we also included collectables like Blue Coins and so on."

The courses in *Super Mario Sunshine* certainly do add more in the way of additional subcourses, as compared to *Super Mario 64* – Sirena Beach has the whole hotel interior of course, and there are one-shot extras like the Sand Bird's tower on Gelato Beach. But the biggest and most prominent addition of extra courses comes in the secret stages. Unlike the main stages, these are exercises in pure platforming and they're typically pretty abstract – while all the game's main courses are rooted in believable tropical island locations, the secret stages are floating in midair with bizarre backgrounds. The most interesting thing about them, though, is that they tend to leave you without one of the game's biggest distinguishing points by taking away FLUDD. "We removed FLUDD from the secret courses because we wanted to add some variation to the difficulty," recalls Koizumi. "The advantages of FLUDD are its ability to let you make low-gravity jumps. Put the other way, by removing FLUDD it makes the jumping more challenging!" Indeed – some of *Sunshine*'s most challenging stages are those in which you haven't got FLUDD.



With all of the attention on FLUDD, there's actually a returning character that people tend to forget about when *Super Mario Sunshine* is discussed – good old Yoshi, who had by this point become a star outside of the *Mario* series, thanks to games like *Yoshi's Island* and *Yoshi's Story*. "Yoshi appeared as a guest character in *Super Mario 64* as well, but you couldn't play as him. So in *Super Mario Sunshine* we wanted to add Yoshi as a playable character you can ride on," says Koizumi. This was the first game since Yoshi was introduced in *Super Mario World* where Yoshi could be ridden by Mario as he was in that first appearance, and he was a bit different. But as it turns out, there's a reason for that according to Koizumi: "Well, strictly speaking, it's just a graffiti version in this game, and not the actual Yoshi!"

As always, Yoshi hatches from an egg, but in this game he'll only respond to the presence of the various fruits scattered throughout each stage. Once you tempt him out with the correct treat, Yoshi is as faithful a companion as ever – he'll put the extra effort in and struggle at the end of a jump to grab you some extra air time, he'll whip enemies into his awaiting mouth with his incredibly lengthy tongue, and he even adds an extra drum track to the music, just as he did in *Super Mario World*. But this ▶





graffiti Yoshi doesn't like water – he'll dissolve if he falls in – and he can shoot juice from his mouth, in a bizarre and sticky twist. However, you don't get a whole lot of opportunities to use Yoshi – he's present for the missions he needs to be in, but he's not found nearly as regularly as in a game like *Super Mario World*.

The anticipation for *Super Mario Sunshine* was palpable, and it's not surprising that the press dedicated huge reviews to the sequel to one of the biggest games ever. However, *Super Mario Sunshine* wasn't a game like *Super Mario 64*. It was bold in a different way – where *Super Mario 64* had to strike out a template for 3D platforming as a whole, *Super Mario Sunshine* had to play with that now-established wisdom, and, in many ways, buck Mario's usual trends. Structurally, this was a game much like *Super Mario 64*, but with messy and experimental innovations thrown in to keep things fresh. In short, this was an evolutionary game rather than a revolutionary game, and the difference still colours the reaction to *Super Mario Sunshine* today.

As you might have expected, *Super Mario Sunshine* launched to critical acclaim when it hit the streets of Japan in July 2002. As the localised releases followed over the next few months, the reviews stayed excellent. If you look at review aggregators today, the average score for the game is 92% – a staggering achievement that any developer would be proud of. NGC's Geraint Evans awarded the game 96% and declared that it was everything you would have wanted it to be, and IGN's 9.4/10 review noted it as being the best single-player game available for the GameCube. Even the often curmudgeonly *Edge*, while noting that the game wasn't quite as good as *Super Mario 64*, still offered the game 9/10 and, preceding Kanye West by some years, declared it "the second best platform game of all time. *Of all time*".

However, as astonishing as it might seem given the praise this indicates, it's clear that certain elements of the gaming press felt a tad let down by the game. Gamespot was probably the most outspoken – Jeff Gerstmann's 8/10 review found a number of points to criticise. "On its own merits, *Super Mario Sunshine* is a solid game with a really distinctive look and some great moments, but it also has its fair share of shortcomings," said the reviewer. "While some





» [GameCube] It's rare to see mirrors that look as good as this in games today, never mind 2002.



"We removed FLUDD from the secret courses to add variation to the difficulty" Yoshiaki Koizumi





» [GameCube] Creative thought was required to work series staples like Boos into a tropical island setting.

gamers will be able to look past or even embrace the fact that *Super Mario Sunshine* sticks extremely close to *Super Mario 64*'s formula, others will find that the game suffers from a lack of innovation. The game's technical issues and often-gimmicky design are still tougher to ignore, and they combine to make the game seem surprisingly unpolished and somewhat rushed at times," he concluded, referencing his criticism of FLUDD and the game's often wayward camera.

The criticisms certainly aren't invalid. *Super Mario Sunshine*'s camera is often wayward, depicting Mario as a silhouette and all objects around him as a basic question mark as it gets stuck behind a wall. The fact that FLUDD and its additional moves never returned could also mark it out as a gimmick. And if it feels like the game had a short development cycle, Gerstmann could well be right – after all, there was just a year between the release of the final game and the Spaceworld 2001 prototype that it barely resembled. It's certainly telling that a third of the game's 120 Shines are attributed to the hub world of Delfino Plaza, rather than any of the main courses that Mario explores. Yet ultimately, this didn't matter a great deal to the players themselves. *Super Mario Sunshine* was the best GameCube platform game available by a country mile when it released, and sold by the bucketload, shifting 5.5 million copies – fewer than previous main *Mario* games (in fact, only half of what *Mario 64* sold) but still comfortably multi-platinum, and that's a big deal as it wasn't a launch game and never came bundled with the console.

When looking back at his own favourite achievements with the game, Koizumi singles out the visuals enabled by the GameCube. "The 3D rendering performance was quite high for the hardware at the time, so I feel like we succeeded with the graphics to make the world feel real," Koizumi recalls. "I felt ▶

LET'S DO THE ODYSSEY

HOW SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE'S DESIGN HAS INFLUENCED NINTENDO'S LATEST ADVENTURE

It's fair to say that *Super Mario Sunshine* was considered a bit of an odd duck at the time it was released. The use of more realistic urban environments was a big departure for Mario. So too was FLUDD, the tool that helped *Mario* clean up Delfino Island, thanks to the way it changed how Mario interacted with his environment.

Skip ahead some 15 years and the forthcoming *Super Mario Odyssey* is the first *Mario* game since *Super Mario Sunshine* to employ open 3D environments and mission-based progression. While you won't see FLUDD, ice levels are most definitely back, it's also fair to say that *Odyssey* is revisiting many of *Sunshine*'s eccentricities. For a start, the game mixes more fantastical environments with ones that draw heavily from our real lives, such as the urban New Donk City – and as in *Sunshine*'s prototype stage, it will feature actual humans. The game is also set to feature another sentient tool for Mario to wear, which greatly affects how he interacts with the environment around him.

When we remark on the similarities, Koizumi reveals that it was a coincidence of development, "Mario's had companions on his adventure before, like FLUDD and Luma, but this isn't actually what we were initially aiming for with Cappy," he explains. "In the same way that FLUDD in *Super Mario Sunshine* can erase graffiti and attack enemies, the origin for Cappy in *Super Mario Odyssey* was in the game design. It was after we gave him some personality and character that we ended up with what we have now."

Cappy is, much like FLUDD, a versatile companion which fulfils a number of gameplay functions. "Cappy plays an important role in Mario's moves in *Super Mario Odyssey*. Mario can throw his cap to destroy things in the stage or use it as a platform to jump long distances," says Koizumi. "You can also use a power that lets you control objects or enemies in a stage by hitting them with your cap." With a simple flick of the wrist, Mario flings Cappy at sentient creatures and takes control of them – you can tell they've been hit with Capture because enemies gain Mario's distinctive red cap and moustache. "We



are always trying to come up with new moves for the player to do in our 3D *Mario* platformers," Koizumi continues. "We implemented this Capture ability that lets you use the abilities of various objects as a way to include more moves in this game than ever before. Players can create their own gameplay experience by looking at enemies and objects and imaging what kind of moves they'd be able to do."

This new ability has caused a rethink of how stages are designed, as compared to *Super Mario Sunshine*. "In the world that Mario is exploring in *Super Mario Odyssey*, there are a variety of Kingdoms (ie stages) both large and small," says Koizumi. "Kingdoms where you can use the new Capture move to control fast-moving characters are very wide. But for stages where you can Capture characters that are good at moving vertically, then we used height variations." How do these stages compare to *Super Mario Sunshine*, we wonder? "A direct comparison isn't possible, but the Kingdoms are more varied and larger than those you would have experienced in *Super Mario Sunshine*." Koizumi also confirmed that you'll move from stage to stage, rather than from a hub world to stages. "There's no central hub area like Delfino Plaza, but instead each Kingdom you visit plays its own role in the story."

We're intrigued to see for ourselves how *Super Mario Odyssey* blends old and new. The game will arrive on 27 October for Nintendo Switch.





SIGHTSEEING GUIDE

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR TIME ON DELFINO ISLAND WITH OUR HANDY GUIDE TO ALL THE MOST EXCITING TOURIST ATTRACTIONS



PIANTA VILLAGE

■ Generations of Piantas have called this village home. Residents live up in the trees, while enormous wild mushrooms thrive on the ground below.



NOKI BAY

■ The home of the Nokis is a land of steep cliffs and abundant waters. Unfortunately, since Mario has arrived, pollution has taken hold in the sea here.



CORONA MOUNTAIN

■ Residents of the island like the hot springs at the foot of this volcano, but Mario will have to venture into its dangerous lava caves to succeed here.



GELATO BEACH

■ Sun-lovers will want to head to this beach at the south of Delfino Island, as it's the biggest around – just watch out for the marauding Wigglers that pop up.



SIRENA BEACH

■ As the night draws in, visitors to Delfino Island retreat to this beach, famed for its magnificent sunset views and the four-star Hotel Delfino.



PINNA PARK

■ The small island that makes up the 'tail' of Delfino Island is host to an amusement park, featuring exciting rides and maybe even a giant metal Bowser...



RICCO HARBOUR

■ The biggest port on Delfino Island is unsurprisingly full of boats, and is said to be the best place on the island to eat some freshly caught seafood.



BIANCO HILLS

■ This picturesque residential community is located in the rolling hills, right by a magnificent lake. Gentle breezes keep the famous windmills spinning.



DELFINO AIRSTRIP

■ This small airstrip serves as the entry and exit point for all air travel to the island. We'd expect something bigger – maybe most tourists travel by boat?





» [GameCube] Clever use of space gives Pianta Village hidden depth – this hanging pathway is under the main level.

> "We lived up to the challenge of making a more realistic Mario game compared to the visuals you'd expect" Yoshiaki Koizumi



we lived up to the challenge of making a slightly more realistic Mario game compared to the visuals you'd normally expect." It's fair to say that many of the effects were breathtaking – the sunset lighting at Sirena Beach and the heat haze visible in the distance in Delfino Plaza really drove home the feeling of a tropical island. However, the water effects stole the show – the gentle waves of the game's sea, with sunlight reflecting off its surface, were amongst the most realistic ever seen in a videogame, and still look fantastic today.

Reflecting on *Super Mario Sunshine*, it seems like it would always have been in a tough spot. Following up a game like *Super Mario 64* is hard, and while *Super Mario Sunshine* was criticised for not being different enough, we can only imagine what people would have thought of some of the other ideas being considered for the game. There had already been a surprised reaction when the GameCube's launch was accompanied not by a *Mario* platform game, but *Luigi's Mansion* – a ghost-hoovering spin-off. We can very easily see a situation in which players would have baulked at a *Mario* disaster recovery game instead of something more like *Super Mario 64*. If *Super Mario Sunshine* disappointed some, that's only because it was following a game that redefined an entire genre. Some of its experiments didn't quite come off as well as hoped, but that actually makes it more endearing – it's a sign that Nintendo is always looking for new directions for its veteran mascot.

Still, *Super Mario Sunshine* is a fantastic game. You can see that from the high review scores and the sales, you can see it in fan attempts to remake the game (including a fantastic Nintendo DS version), and you can feel it when you play the game – there are few things in gaming as fun as knocking over a Wiggler with sand dunes, or finally catching that pesky Shadow Mario. And that's what matters at the end of the day – *Super Mario Sunshine* might not have had quite the same impact as its predecessor, but games aren't about impact, they're about entertainment. And 15 years on, *Sunshine* is still as entertaining as ever. ✱



» [GameCube] A more industrial environment, like Ricco Harbour, gives Mario apparatus to climb.



DELFINO PLAZA

■ The commercial hub of Delfino Island is also the hub world of the game. Merchant Piantas set out their stalls with fruit, and boats ferry goods to and fro.



Atari 800XL

» **MANUFACTURER:** Atari » **YEAR:** 1983 » **COST:** £249.95 (launch), £30+ (today)

When Atari introduced the Atari 400 and 800 computers in 1979, it achieved reasonable success in spite of high prices necessitated by high manufacturing costs. An initial attempt at cost reduction came in the form of the 1200XL, announced in 1982, but this model was unpopular with users with its poor value due to missing features. As a price war consumed the market during 1983, Atari realised that it needed to cut costs further and regain the trust of consumers. The 1200XL was swiftly discontinued and replaced with two new models – the 800XL and 600XL.

Compared to the original Atari 800, the Atari 800XL was significantly less complex and expensive to produce. Where the older machine had multiple circuit boards and heavy RF shielding, the new design fit everything onto a single board with more modest shielding. Thanks to advances in chip production, fewer chips were used too. It was also smaller than the 1200XL, from which the 800XL adopted its visual style. The 800XL went on to become the most popular machine in the Atari 8-bit family, but due to supply problems and an ongoing price war it failed to turn around the fortunes of its beleaguered manufacturer. *



EDITOR'S CHOICE Star Raiders

Even though it was a few years old by the time the Atari 800XL arrived, *Star Raiders* could still be considered a killer app for the Atari 8-bit family. Your job was to pilot a ship in defence of Atarian space stations, fending off attacks from the evil Zylons in open space combat. It's still fun to play, and turned out to be a game of historical importance – *Star Raiders* convinced Archer MacLean to pick up his own Atari computer, and was a key reference point when David Braben and Ian Bell wrote their own space epic, *Elite*.





Atari 800XL fact

■ The Atari 600XL has just 16KB RAM and lacks composite video output, allowing it a slightly narrower motherboard and case, but is otherwise functionally identical to its more expensive counterpart.

RAM: 64KB
PROCESSOR: MOS 6502-BASED SALLY 8-BIT CPU (1.79 MHZ)
GRAPHICS: ATARI ANTIC AND GTIA
AUDIO: ATARI POKEY
MEDIA: ROM CARTRIDGE (CASSETTE AND FLOPPY DISK OPTIONAL)

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO LASER SQUAD

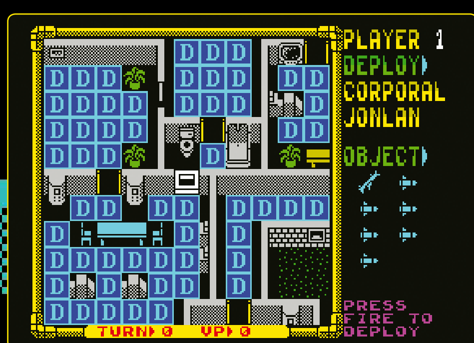




During the Eighties, Julian Gollop refined strategy games. Regarded by fans as the genre's pinnacle, Retro Gamer brings you the ultimate guide to the imperious Laser Squad

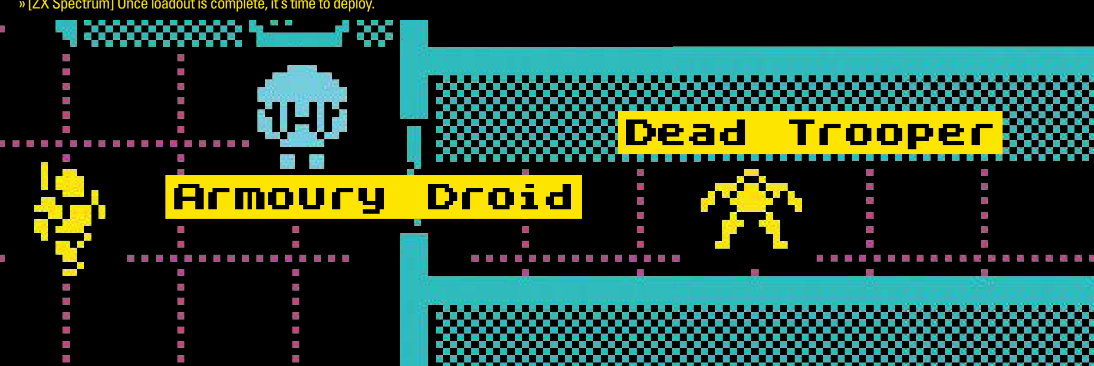
As a genre, 8-bit strategy games had quite the fervent following back in the early Eighties. Often ugly, impenetrable and lacking much of a sense of control over proceedings, the games were often revered by a small cluster of fans, but rarely broke into the mainstream. Julian Gollop, initially under the banner of Red Shift, took the template and merged it with a slightly less cerebral, more combat-laden tone to create the famous *Rebelstar* games. If you want to read more about those excellent titles, check out our History Of *Rebelstar* back in issue 142. This month we're focusing on the game that Julian had, in essence, been building up to throughout the entire decade.

Despite the overall brilliance of the turn-based *Rebelstar* games, even their author would admit they had weaknesses, both in terms of their design and his own abilities. The core mechanics of *Laser Squad* were there, but the games were too easy, especially for experienced gamers, and each one was limited in terms of weaponry options and missions – the excitement of fast-paced combat could only go so far. For *Laser Squad*, one of Julian's key early decisions was to introduce a weapons loadout – at the start of each mission the player had a limited number of credits with which to kit out their team, and a varied arsenal to select from. Gone were medi-probes, coffee tokens and photons; in came auto-pistols, heavy lasers, grenades and sniper rifles. Experience and trial and error teaches the team commander how much armour can be allocated to their squad, and which weapons were the best value for money. Do you go for those extra couple of clips for your laser rifles, or issue those devastating grenades to them instead? Decisions such as these play a vital part in swinging each battle. Once the loadout is completed, the scenario begins, and here is where *Laser Squad* really shines, for this is



» [ZX Spectrum] Once loadout is complete, it's time to deploy.

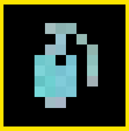




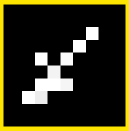
SQUAD

STICK TO YOUR GUNS

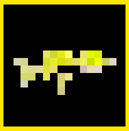
The weapons of Laser Squad and what they do



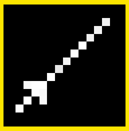
AP50 GRENADE
■ A lightweight explosive that does a significant amount of damage within a considerable range. Useful in a tight corner, but needs priming.

DAGGER


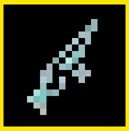
■ One of only two melee weapons, and let's be honest, if you've got close enough to use it, you're doing something wrong…



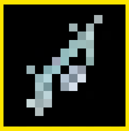
L50 LAS-GUN
■ Marginally better than similar rifles in terms of auto-shot AP cost, but underpowered in comparison. Best avoided unless you like being shot.

LIGHT SABRE


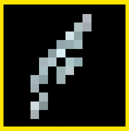
■ This melee weapon inflicts massive damage upon any enemy if you get close enough to use it, but the chances are that you won't.



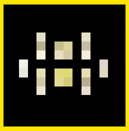
MARSEC AUTO-GUN
■ A weapon of choice. Packs a punch, and has relatively low AP costs. It also has decent accuracy.

MK-2


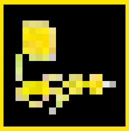
■ A very slightly-improved version of the MK-1 rifle, however it is not really worth the extra money that you'll end up shelling out for it.



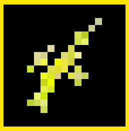
PUMP SHOTGUN
■ A strangely contemporary weapon among the futuristic lasers, the shotgun has no autofire and is only really worth using at close range.



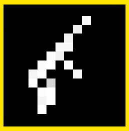
AP75 GRENADE
■ As with the AP50, but double the weight, and almost double the damage. Indispensable against armoured opposition.

HEAVY LASER


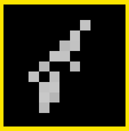
■ Similar to *Rebelstar*'s Photon, this is a low-AP cost gun that's wildly inaccurate with medium firepower. As the name suggests, also very heavy.



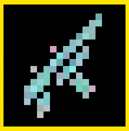
L80 LAS-GUN
■ Basically, a laser-guided sniper rifle. Incredibly accurate with an aimed shot, but not auto-fire makes it useless close up.

M50 AUTO-PISTOL


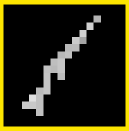
■ As inaccurate as the heavy laser, but considerably lighter and does more damage. A good backup weapon.



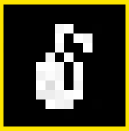
MARSEC PISTOL
■ Low ammunition capacity and slow rate of fire make this pistol a good back up weapon only.

M5 AUTO CANNON


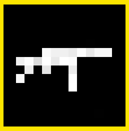
■ Heavy and expensive, this fires a powerful explosive shot that deals out explosions similar to a grenade.



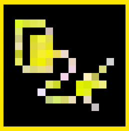
SNIPER RIFLE
■ As you might expect, hugely accurate and only any good at range. No autoshot, but that's not really what it's for anyway.



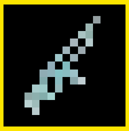
AP100 GRENADE
■ Despite its name, not as powerful as the AP75, but just as heavy. Only available in missions six and seven.

KASTEC AUTO-GUN


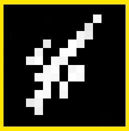
■ A cheaper version of the Marsec Auto-gun that boasts lower AP cost, but also lower damage.



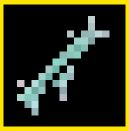
LAS-CUTTER
■ An essential device in scenario six, it can cut through solid steel doors with ease, and people too, although that's a tad messier.

M4000 AUTO-GUN


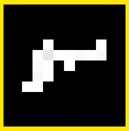
■ Virtually identical to its rival, the Marsec Auto-gun, the M4000 loses out in AP Cost and damage.



MK-1
■ It's extremely accurate but also costly in AP terms. Packs a punch when it hits, but you won't get many chances to use it.

ROCKET LAUNCHER


■ Along with the AP75 grenade, this deals the most damage in the game. AP heavy, but worth it.



SP30 PISTOL
■ Better than the other pistols thanks to its excellent damage percentage, but still only really worth it as a secondary weapon.

JULIAN GOLLOP

We talk to the man behind this fantastic 8-bit strategy game



Had some of the ideas that we saw *Laser Squad* been considered in your earlier games?
Yes, for sure. Line of sight in particular was something I wanted to do, because it was something board games could not do easily. In fact, I designed a board game that involved hidden soldiers and line of sight rules – but it required a player to act as moderator and it was rather slow and cumbersome. As for equipping the soldiers, this was very much a feature I wanted from my earliest experiments with videogames. I was heavily influenced by RPGs here.

The campaigns hang loosely together. Did you consider a more structured story-based approach?
It was actually supposed to be a campaign following a particular story and, in fact, the PC release had three short stories in a booklet which covered the first three scenarios. If I had figured a way to carry over soldiers with improvements, I probably would have done it – but this feature would have to wait until *X-COM*.

The original release came with three scenarios and two more offered via mail order. Sounds like early DLC.
Yes, we thought it was a brilliant idea, and indeed did quite a trade in our expansion kits. Each kit came on a short tape, with a scenario on each side and we made two of them for *Laser Squad*.

Were there any plans for a sequel?
Indeed there were, in fact. We made a demo, which was a simple two-player demo with limited graphics. It did have a few innovations: isometric graphics, 3D shooting and fully animated characters. However, we wanted to find a new publisher, so we approached MicroProse, but they wanted a much bigger game, something that could compete with *Civilization*. So *Laser Squad* became *UFO: Enemy Unknown*.

***Laser Squad* is regarded today as one of the finest 8-bit strategy games. What do you think makes it so popular with its fans?**
I think it was quite a refined turn-based system, with customisable squads and different ways of playing the game. The hidden movement of enemies also adds some real tension, and for the time it was totally unique. And the strategy and arcade elements helped make it so successful.



"I think it was quite a refined turn-based system"

Julian Gollop

▶ no lone mission as in *Rebelstar*. The original 8-bit game contains three different missions, and each one requires an alternate set of tactics. From eliminating an arms dealer to liberating rebels, each scenario connects loosely to the theme of the rebelstars, heroic freedom fighters contesting a valiant battle against an evil government and its factions, such as the Metallix Corporation.

Each scenario has a pattern of deployment squares (marked simply as 'D'), and in conjunction with an overviewing scanner, the player places their squad carefully across the map. Once this is done, the mission proceeds in turns, with the human player always taking first dig when playing against the computer. Equipment is stored in each character's own inventory and they begin empty-handed; first order of business, then, is to arm everyone, unless you plan to fight this battle by just using harsh language. Equipping a weapon, like everything in *Laser Squad*, uses action points, or AP. Unlike the *Rebelstar* games, each character is now a semi-animated sprite, turning on the spot within the pseudo-3D screens. This is vital, considering the most important improvement the game boasts over its predecessors: tactical line-of-sight combat.



» [Amiga] Preparing to assault the moonbase.



» [Amstrad] The tactical map is a fundamental part of every mission.

In *Rebelstar* and Rebelstar 2, the player can see any unit in their turn, even if it's on the other side of the map. While this may make for a quicker and more exciting game, as there's no need to slowly creep across the screen in case of enemy attack, it's a method that distinctly lacks realism. In *Laser Squad*, enemies are unseen until they appear in the character's field of vision, creating a dramatic sense of tension previously absent. Opportunity fire, a clever, if underused, concept from *Rebelstar*, suddenly becomes one of the most tactically fundamental parts of the game. As a result, its implementation is smoothed out – now players have to merely leave the prerequisite amount of action points remaining to a squaddie before ending the turn. Should any unlucky enemy soldier wander into view, their progress is paused while the other player gleefully rains laser fire upon them. Further strategic complexities are there for the player to discover, such as



» [ZX Spectrum] When entering fire mode, a new, simpler version of the game map appears.

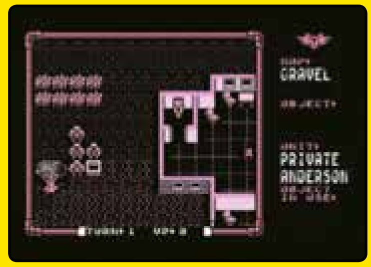
CONVERSION CAPERS

How the later versions of the game compare



AMIGA

■ The belated release of the 16-bit versions saw a number of improvements graphically, and sonically. The gameplay is essentially the same, although a cumbersome transfer effect between menus slows things down, and there were only five missions released with no expansion materialising. Impressive intro screens help set the scene and give each mission a weightier feel.



AMSTRAD CPC

■ Also coded by Julian Gollop, the Amstrad iteration of Laser Squad loses much of the colour from the original ZX Spectrum version, although it does boast some nice electronically apt sound effects. Like the C64 conversion, lucky Amstrad owners got an extra four missions, with Laser Platoon and The Stardrive available as a later second expansion pack.



ATARI ST

■ Naturally very similar to the Amiga port, the Atari ST version was also coded by Teque Software AKA Krisalis Software, a team including Frederic O'Rourke (programming) and Jason Wilson (graphics). Both versions offer excellent tunes from Matt Furniss and were published in the United States by Microlllusions.



COMMODORE 64

■ Coded by Julian's brother, Nick, with help from the man himself, the Commodore 64 port of *Laser Squad* is virtually identical to the ZX Spectrum game in visual terms. Aurally it improves greatly on it, although the game's explosions seem wimpy in comparison to the crunching effect on the Sinclair machine.



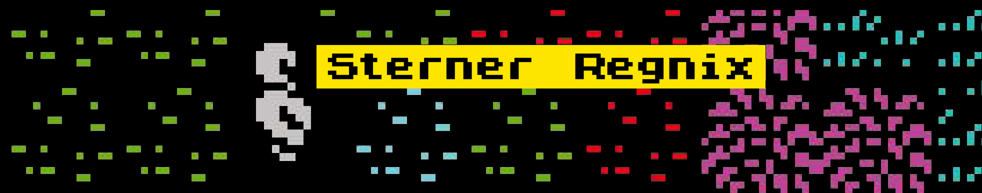
PC

■ *Laser Squad* on the PC is the version that differs mostly from the original in terms of gameplay, and for one, big, reason: it uses mouse control. This means, instead of the player having to 'learn' the amount of action points each movement uses, the game very helpfully tells you right before you click your action to confirm.



MSX

■ As with many MSX games, this is a straight port of the ZX Spectrum version, and consequently still a very good game. Strangely, however, the MSX version was only released in Italy, although cracks exist online with the game's text converted back into English. This version was unknown to Julian, so is likely an unofficial port.



SQUAD GOALS

Retro Gamer's tactical guide to beating Laser Squad's missions

- Armour is a luxury. It's costly and weighs down your squad, reducing their action points. Use sparingly, if at all.
- **The best all-round weapon is the Marsec Auto-Gun.**
- Grenades are very useful for clearing dangerous areas – but, obviously, don't forget to prime them!
- **Learning the number of action points required for each movement is key – moves cannot be undone.**
- Opportunity fire is your friend. Move slowly and cautiously, and always have troopers covering flanks with it.
- **Ensure each trooper has the correct ammo clips. Scavenging from the field is dangerous and consumes valuable AP.**
- For more open missions, such as The Assassins, or ones with long corridors or tunnels, it's always worth equipping one trooper with a sniper rifle.
- **Open doors are a dead giveaway to your movements. Born in a barn? Shut those doors behind you!**
- Beware the vidscreens. These pepper most levels and have a nasty habit of exploding when shot. Check your fire!

"We approached MicroProse, but they wanted a much bigger game"

Julian Gollop

windows that enemies can be spied through, destructible environments, explosive scenery and the individual requirements of each mission. In addition, the player must manage the human element of their squad. Too much incessant hiking around the map and your soldiers will lose stamina and action points; lose too many of your team and its remaining members slowly become nervous, before a full-scale panic attack ensues, together with the attendant drastic reduction of action points.

As with Julian's other games, *Laser Squad* originated on the ZX Spectrum, with Julian himself converting the game to the Amstrad



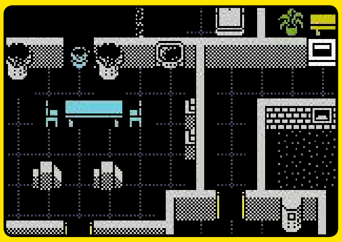
» [C64] The C64 port was coded by Julian's brother, Nick

several months later, and his brother Nick to the Commodore 64. Having formed Target Games with Nick, the initial idea was to sell the game themselves, directly to distributors, and the game had a limited release with a sole robotic trooper on its cover. After coming to the conclusion they needed better marketing, Julian and Nick were approached by an agent who set up Blade Software with Krisalis Software for further publication of *Laser Squad*. These latter releases of the 8-bit versions include the two extra missions initially offered via mail order (*Paradise Valley* and *The Cyber Hordes*), with Blade also publishing the Amiga, Atari ST and PC versions. Despite Target retaining the expansion kit mail order rights for the further two missions (*The Stardrive* and *Laser Platoon*), the shift meant Julian could focus more on what he loves: game development.

In retrospect, the outstanding aspect of *Laser Squad* is how, unlike many of its peers, you don't *have* to be a fan of the strategy genre to appreciate the game, and the love for it, especially on the Spectrum, is no better shown than in the range of fan-made level editors, maps and remakes. *Laser Squad's* ease of play – you can realistically jump straight into the game – and considerable

SQUAD TACTICS

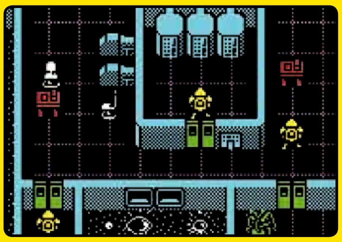
Laser Squad's seven scenarios and how to beat them



THE ASSASSINS

■ You know what Marsec is: it's the arms supplier who most likely made the gun you're holding. However its boss, Sterner Regnix, is using mind control drugs and other unpleasant means to get the best from his employees. Take him out!

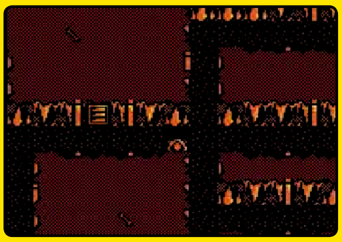
HOW TO BEAT IT: There's a sensible way – and a fun way. The former involves infiltrating Regnix's base and focusing on the living quarters where he'll no doubt be skulking. The latter is tooling up with a rocket launcher or two and systematically decimating his house. Less precise, but oh-so-satisfying.



MOONBASE ASSAULT

■ In the first of several nods to Julian's previous games, this scenario concerns the Omni Corporation's base on Arid-6 which houses a vast database on Sector Nine, a sector containing the infamous Rebelstar.

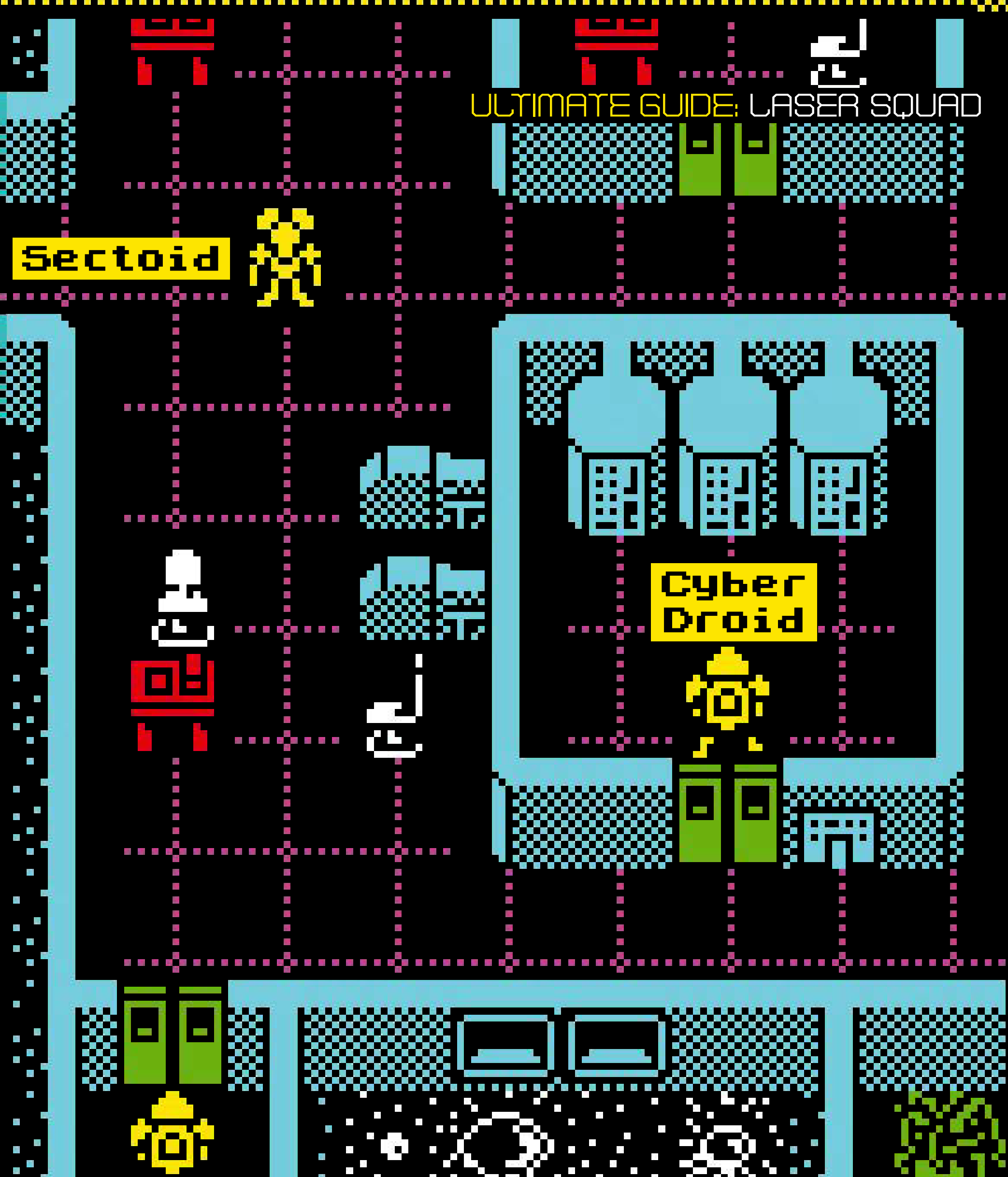
HOW TO BEAT IT: The base's guardians generally reside within the central area, with a few scouts outside. Ignore the top of the base and take two teams in via the southern doors. Leave one soldier guarding the rear (on opportunity fire) and advance slowly, taking out databanks as you go.



RESCUE FROM THE MINES

■ As the name suggests, this is a mission where the aim is to rescue three captives, taken prisoner when their routine recon mission goes awry. Lead another mission to free the men and escort them to safety.

HOW TO BEAT IT: Place two rebels to the left and three to the right. Make sure you have explosives in each team, and study the map to check the whereabouts of the prisoners. One enemy holds a key to a vidscreen that allows you to see the enemy positions. Its acquisition is invaluable.



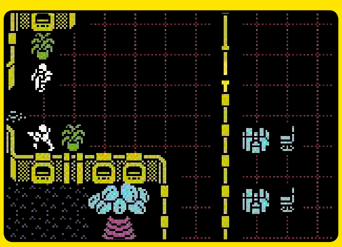


» [ZX Spectrum] Each squad member has a set of statistics that determines their ability to fire and move

depth, demonstrates that even the most ardent of arcade shoot-'em-up freak will soon find themselves embroiled in the classic sci-fi struggle of plucky rebels versus evil empire.

Its AI presents a stiff challenge, especially on the higher levels, but it's with the two-player option – something Julian always preferred thanks to his board game roots – where the game really shines through best. And honestly, what better way is there to spend an afternoon with a friend than battling it out with Marsec auto-guns and AP50 grenades? ★

Our thanks to Julian for his time.



THE CYBER HORDES

■ The rebels are on the back foot. Forced to defend their base, the key here are seven stabiliser cores that throttle the seismic instability of the planet. An Imperial droid squad has been sent in to destroy them.

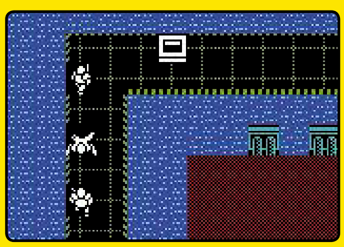
HOW TO BEAT IT: Possibly the trickiest of the missions, as the Cyber Hordes include the heavily-armoured Battle Droid that can only really be destroyed from front-on using heavy explosives. Give up the cores to the left, form an opportunity fire perimeter in the middle of the base, and pray.



PARADISE VALLEY

■ With an Imperial fleet lurking overhead, the rebels decide to put their secret starfighter's plans onto a security device and charge a small team with escorting it across the deadly Paradise Valley to a waiting transport.

HOW TO BEAT IT: Focus all your squad to either secure the top or bottom of the valley. The first half is very rarely populated with venomous splurges, so it's easy to hack across swiftly before making sure the person carrying the device is well protected in the second half of the valley.



THE STARDRIVE

■ A group of dastardly mercenaries has stolen the stardrive from the rebel's fancy new spaceship and taken it back to their home base on Prozine 5. The legendary rebel squad, The 7th Brigade, has been sent in to recover the device, and stick it to the mercs.

HOW TO BEAT IT: Enemy droids spawn from open corridors in the north and south. Assign a squad to each point and leave a man there to cover them otherwise you'll find your rear exposed. Don't forget to equip a Las-cutter as you'll need it to break in to the mercenary base in order to reacquire the drive.



LASER PLATOON

■ An elimination level, with no specific plot or requirement other than to utterly destroy the enemy, clean and simple. Enemy reinforcements will appear every five turns, and to win all enemy units must be destroyed before they arrive.

HOW TO BEAT IT: This is a little different in that the scenario can continue indefinitely as reinforcements simply continue as long as troops remain alive on the field. Monitoring the reinforcements is key here, so an assault is timed to avoid pesky enemies arriving just as you have them on the back foot.



Elemental Master

IT'S TIME TO BRAVE THE ELEMENTS

» RETROREVIVAL

» MEGA DRIVE » 1990 » TECHNO SOFT

A few years back I began collecting for the Mega Drive, focusing on Japanese games due to their superior box art. I've not got the biggest collection (44 games) but all the games get a fair amount of rotation.

One of those games is *Elemental Master*, a gem of a Mega Drive shooter that tends to get forgotten, possibly because it never received a European release. Taking control of a warrior, you walk up the screen, dispensing justice by rapidly pressing the fire button. You can shoot both in front and behind you and the varying waves of enemies ensure that you always need to keep your wits about you.

The first four stages can be approached in any way you choose and are heavily themed around the four elements. What's brilliant here, though, is the environmental level design, which gives *Elemental Master* a wonderfully organic feel. The Earth level has trees that partially obscure your view, while the fire stage has lines of lava that appear through cracks and need to be avoided. The enemies you face are equally interesting, ranging from bow-carrying centaurs to flaming birds, with more types appearing on higher difficulty levels (which need to be accessed by pressing A and Start simultaneously at the title screen). The bosses are equally imposing, typically using a dangerous elemental attack against you, which can then be collected and used, *Mega Man*-style upon defeating them.

Once you've completed the first four stages you can take on the three remaining levels, which are challenging, but certainly not on par with some of Techno Soft's earlier blasters. I'd certainly recommend you use that secret menu, because the game otherwise offers little challenge. Played on the higher difficulty settings you're treated to some of the best blasting on the system. I'd also recommend picking up the Japanese version, as it not only features far better artwork, but is available for virtually half the price. Your wallet can thank me later. *


TOP
068000
SCORE
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SIERRA

THE ADVENTURE GAME YEARS

If you owned a PC with MS-DOS on it, chances are you played a Sierra On-Line game. Led by Ken Williams, the Californian development house produced interactive stories of the highest order. But, as it turns out, life at the company wasn't always easy. Edward Love investigates…



» [Apple II] Sierra's first game, *Mystery House*, featured crude drawings that were works of art by the standards of 1980.



» [MS-DOS] A digital representation of Sierra's headquarters at the foot of the Yosemite National Park.

At its height in the Eighties and early Nineties, Sierra On-Line was a creative powerhouse. Writers, programmers, designers, musicians and technical staff arrived to work at a squat building at the foot of the Sierra mountain range in Oakhurst, California. The building housed 300 occupants. The town, filled with valley roads bordered by towering sequoia trees a mere 6,000 residents. There were few distractions, then, to keep Sierra from realising its vision to be the biggest developer of computer games in the world, and to master one type in particular: the adventure. Here was a genre that promised an interactive story and demanded no shortage of puzzle-solving. In the days of MS-DOS, the adventure game was the bestselling ticket in town and Sierra was ticket master. But as it turns out, life at Sierra's could be very taxing indeed.

"It was crazy insane," recalls designer Corey Cole. "You'd be there 12 hours a day, not even remembering your passcode to get into the building, under constant stress. But we got to take our ideas and make them real. We didn't do it for the pay, we did it because we loved making games." Even by industry standards of the time, Sierra employees took a 40 per cent pay cut, but the chance to experience one of the most dynamic environments in videogaming was hard to pass up.

"We didn't do it for the pay, we did it because we loved making games"
Corey Cole

Exciting, dynamic games were the order of the day. This was Ken Williams' rule – Ken being the founder of Sierra and the man that kept the cogs turning. "Ken was full of ideas," Corey remembers. "Our producer once said: 'Pay attention to what Ken says, but don't take it as an order or you'll never get anything done. If you hear Ken say anything once, it's an interesting idea. If you ever hear him say it twice, keep it in mind, and if says it three times: it's a rule.'"

Ken Williams married Roberta Heuer shortly before his 20th birthday and decided to get rich. Writing code was relatively new, but lucrative, so Ken talked his way into programming jobs. The jobs were often out of his league, but he read books on the subject hours before stepping into the interview hot seat. He was a dab hand at selling himself and he was prepared to work night and day to get ahead.

Then, he got himself an Apple II and discovered a creative distraction entitled *Adventure*, a text-only game where you typed in commands and responded to scenarios on the screen. Unthinkingly, he showed it to his wife and ushered Roberta Williams into a world she didn't want to escape from – where a story sat at your fingertips, and asked that you shape it.

Roberta crafted a whodunit in the vein of Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None* and ▶



» The city of Tarna would act as a bridge between *Quest For Glory 2* and *Quest For Glory 4*, slowly getting players used to the idea of a darker setting.

INSTANT EXPERT

- **From 1980-1996, Sierra created over 50 original titles, including the *King's Quest* series, *Space Quest*, *Police Quest*, *Quest For Glory*, *Leisure Suit Larry*, *Gabriel Knight* and gore fest *Phantasmagoria*.**

- Sierra's first major commercial success, *King's Quest*, was created in part to bolster sales for the IBM Junior. The Junior was a failure, but crucially, Ken Williams brokered a deal to keep the rights to the engine, named it the Adventure Games Interpreter, and used this technology to produce more 16-colour adventure games.

- ***Softporn Adventure* was Sierra's first stab at 'adult' content. To sell the game, the team shot a risqué advert depicting three naked women sipping champagne in a hot tub. One of those women? Roberta Williams. The hot tub? That was Ken's.**

- Games were an emerging industry in Sierra's heyday and it was possible to attract top talent to this burgeoning and exciting space, including Mark Hamill, who lent his voice to a police detective in the first *Gabriel Knight*.

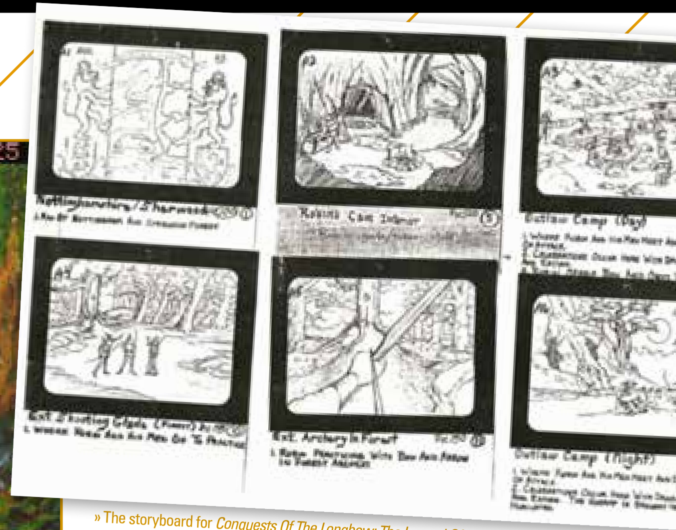
- ***Phantasmagoria* was Sierra's bestselling original title, selling over a million copies.**

- In the Nineties, Sierra was gearing up for a merger with CUC International. The company slashed its budgets to increase profit (despite *Phantasmagoria* costing four times more than it was supposed to) and in 1996, Ken sold the company. He believed he was safeguarding Sierra's future. That proved a fatal misjudgement.





» [PC] *Longbow* told the stories of folk hero Robin Hood.



» The storyboard for *Conquests Of The Longbow: The Legend Of Robin Hood* reveal just how much planning went into Sierra's games.

TIMELINE

1980 ■ Ken and Roberta Williams produce *Mystery House* and sell the game from their own home.

1982 ■ **Ken leaves his day job behind and the husband-and-wife team move to premises in Oakhurst. Sierra On-Line is born.**

1983 ■ IBM contacts Sierra to make a game for its IBM Junior. Roberta gets to work with her team on their adventure game, *King's Quest*.

1984 ■ ***King's Quest*** **fails to make an impression on the IBM Junior. However, Sierra retains the licence to the engine and ports** ***King's Quest*** **to the Tandy 1000, PC and Apple II, where the game becomes a hit. Sierra now had the tech to create the Adventure Game Interpreter (AGI).**

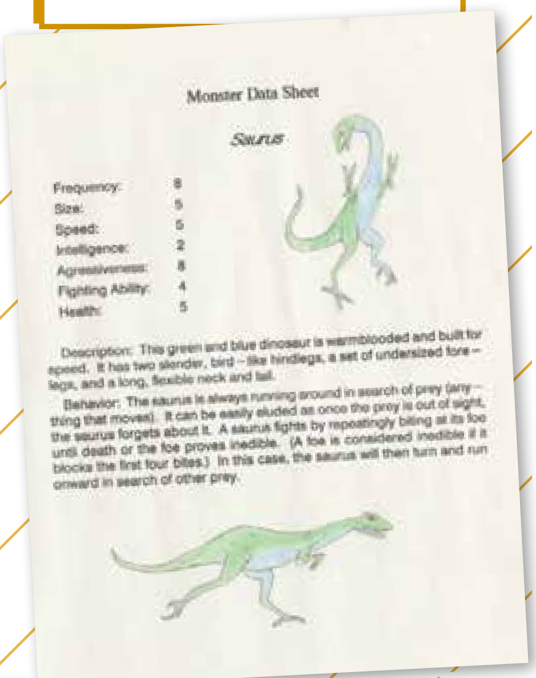
1988 ■ The Sierra Creative Interpreter is released. Early titles include *Codename: Iceman*, *Colonel's Bequest*, *Space Quest III* and *King's Quest IV*. Full mouse support (for pointing and clicking) would follow a few years later.

1991 ■ **Sierra begins remaking its old AGI titles in 256 colours with mouse support, beginning with** ***Leisure Suit Larry*****.**

1995 ■ The company experiments with full-motion video, capturing live actors in studios built for the purpose.

1996 ■ **Ken sells Sierra to CUC International and departs the company a year later.**

1998 ■ Sierra publishes *Half-Life*, and the reign of the adventure game is effectively over.



Monster Data Sheet

Saurus

Frequency:	8
Size:	5
Speed:	5
Intelligence:	2
Agressiveness:	8
Fighting Ability:	4
Health:	5

Description: This green and blue dinosaur is warmblooded and built for speed. It has two slender, bird – like hindlegs, a set of undersized fore – legs, and a long, flexible neck and tail.

Behavior: The saurus is always running around in search of prey (any – thing that moves). It can be easily eluded as once the prey is out of sight, the saurus forgets about it. A saurus fights by repeatingly biting at its foe until death or the foe proves inedible. (A foe is considered inedible if it blocks the first four bites.) In this case, the saurus will then turn and run onward in search of other prey.

» The Coles meticulously drew up fact files on all the enemies in their games. Above is a data sheet from the original *Hero's Quest*.

▶ named it *Mystery House*. Ken was impressed and devised a method of putting crude stick-figure drawings on the screen. They tested the waters and sold the game themselves, forgoing the process of picking up a meagre check in the mail from a publisher. *Mystery House* sold an estimated 10,000 copies and Sierra was born. Over the next decade and a half, the company became a phenomenon, and the Sierra logo with its rousing theme tune would fill many players with joy.

Throughout the Eighties, Ken's pursuit of perfection turned Sierra into a household name, and his games, played mostly on home computers, varied in tone and flavour. The *Space Quest* series centred on bumbling janitor Roger Wilco contriving to save the galaxy. *Police Quest* took real detective work and made it a focus of the story. And *King's Quest* was about wizards and witches in lands fit for a fairytale.

In 1988, Ken wanted more – specifically, a game that would blow *Ultima II* out of the water. "Find me a prizewinning tournament-level dungeon master," he told his team. It delivered two: Corey and Lori Cole.

Lifelong D&D fans, Lori and Corey went to work. As was the Sierra way, they were left to flourish with minimal interference, but that practice was nearly the end of them. When Ken finally stopped at their station to see what they were working on, he didn't see a speck of *Ultima* on the screen. Ready to wield the axe, Ken was talked down by his son, Chris, who convinced his father that the demo was better than *Ultima II*. Ken left the meeting with his son declaring, "I love it!"

And so *Hero's Quest* was born, which was renamed *Quest For Glory*. The finished product looked like a traditional Sierra title, but was spliced with extra layers of choice. "Sierra didn't have the engine to make *Ultima*, but they did have a programming architecture suited to adventure games," Lori recalls. "Why throw it away and start from scratch? We were using the existing engine and placing the role-playing stuff on top of it, and building from there." Looking back, it's an extraordinary piece of work, in particular because it has all the hallmarks of modern RPGs. You're a nameless thief, mage or fighter, and you're free to choose your path through the story, but you'll need to hone your chosen craft to survive the wildlands where creatures lurk in wait. Stats can be improved by seeking out specialists, or through repetition alone, and it's a particularly guilty pleasure to discover the thief's guild as you pillage the town of Spielburg for all it's worth.

Over the next six years, the Coles would make three sequels and add their Midas touch to several other golden Sierra properties. Throughout this time, Sierra's

DEFINING GAMES



KING'S QUEST: QUEST FOR THE CROWN

1984

■ The beginning of the series took 18 months of graft and nearly a million dollars to pull off, but the results were worth it: players had almost unprecedented control over their avatar and the visuals were state of the art. Plus, IBM had covered the costs, hoping *King's Quest* would make the IBM Junior a success. When the Junior sank, *King's Quest* lived on, finding a home on the Apple II and Tandy 1000.



LAURA BOW: THE DAGGER OF AMON RA

1992

■ The murder mystery was a genre that Sierra game designer Roberta Williams came back to throughout the company's history, but *Dagger Of Amon Ra* is the one that stands the test of time. Set inside a museum over the course of one night, you're tasked with finding out who's responsible for the dead bodies that pile up in the various exhibits.



"Ken would wander the halls of the empire he had built and drop in on teams at random"
Lori Cole

larger-than-life owner loomed large. "Ken was chaotic," Lori recounts of her boss. "It was whim of the day." He would wander the halls of the empire he had built and drop in on teams at random. Sometimes it could be weeks or months before he showed up at all. But if that corn-coloured moustache appeared in your view, then you better have something to show him.

The pressure was intense, but when everyone was working in sync, it was magic. "We'd be throwing ideas around, trying new things, constantly doing crazy creative stuff," Corey remembers. "The artists would take Lori's simple diagrams and turn them into brilliantly animated characters and we would be blown away."

But Sierra was a commercial machine and games were being shipped out the door fast. "We were making games that needed three years in 12 months and juggling several duties at once," Corey notes. "Sierra had a crazy idea of what a project director was. You were a writer, a game designer, a manager, a team leader, a programmer – all in one."

Quest For Glory II (released in 1990) bears the hallmarks of this stress. One area late in the game, Raseir, is suffused with a foreboding atmosphere. It turns out Raseir is an anagram of Sierra. "The experience you get when you play one of these games is very close to the experience the developer had making it," Corey says. "The joy of making it would come through, but so would the lows." Untenable deadlines dragged the Coles down, and it wasn't uncommon to come up against team members unwilling to knit together, or actively proving a hindrance.

After *Quest For Glory II* shipped, the Coles dove headlong into other projects, but it wasn't until 1993's *Quest For Glory: Shadows of Darkness* that they got to make the game they had always craved. *Shadows Of Darkness* was an artful demonstration of mood and atmosphere that took players to Mordavia, a splendid vision of Transylvania where creatures of the night lurked in the valleys and shady town inhabitants were shrouded in equal layers of mystery.

"There was an ongoing sense of dread and darkness," Lori remembers, the result of years of reading, travelling and lived experiences. "Unlike most programmers, who are plucked out of college and told to get to work, we were in our thirties when we joined, and that made a difference to the games we made."

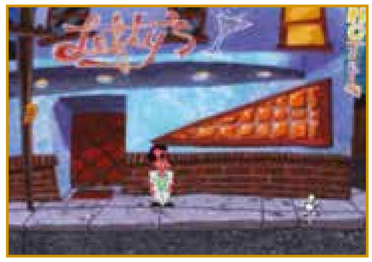
Shadows Of Darkness feels like a mature and adult offering, but though Lori's vision was immaculately realized in the final version, the MS-DOS version had to make Christmas 1993, leaving the Coles and their 30-strong team an unbelievably short window to bug test it. *Shadows Of Darkness* was boxed and sent to store shelves two thirds complete, leaving the Coles holed up inside the Oakhurst office over the winter holidays answering calls from frustrated players who couldn't get past game-breaking bugs.

They began to sketch plans for a fifth game, but budgets were being slashed to increase ▶



» [PC] *The Quest For Glory* series brought refined RPG systems to the world of traditional puzzle-solving.

VGA VISIONARY



■ **Sierra was not only a creative powerhouse, it was ahead of its time technologically. In 1984, the company used its AGI engine to render games in stunning 16 colours and to give players unprecedented control over where they moved. Then, in 1988, the company debuted the markedly improved Sierra Creative Interpreter.**

SCI's earliest incarnation produced *Codename: Iceman*, *Police Quest II* and *The Colonel's Bequest*, which supported a higher 320x200 resolution (as opposed to 160x200), better animation and limited mouse support. Though players still typed in commands, the mouse could be used to move the character around the screen.

In 1990, Sierra experimented with SCI1, designed for a VGA era. *Jones In The Fast Lane* and the *Castle Of Dr Brain* came out in splendid 256 colours, followed by *King's Quest V*. All future Sierra games would adopt this look, and the company decided to remake its games in the new style.



QUEST FOR GLORY: SHADOWS OF DARKNESS
1993

■ This was the culmination of years of refinement and the game the Coles had always wanted to make. The original MS-DOS version of *Quest For Glory: Shadows Of Darkness* was plagued with various issues, but the CD-ROM version, released a year later, came out virtually kink-free, and is an RPG-adventure of the highest order.



PHANTASMAGORIA
1995

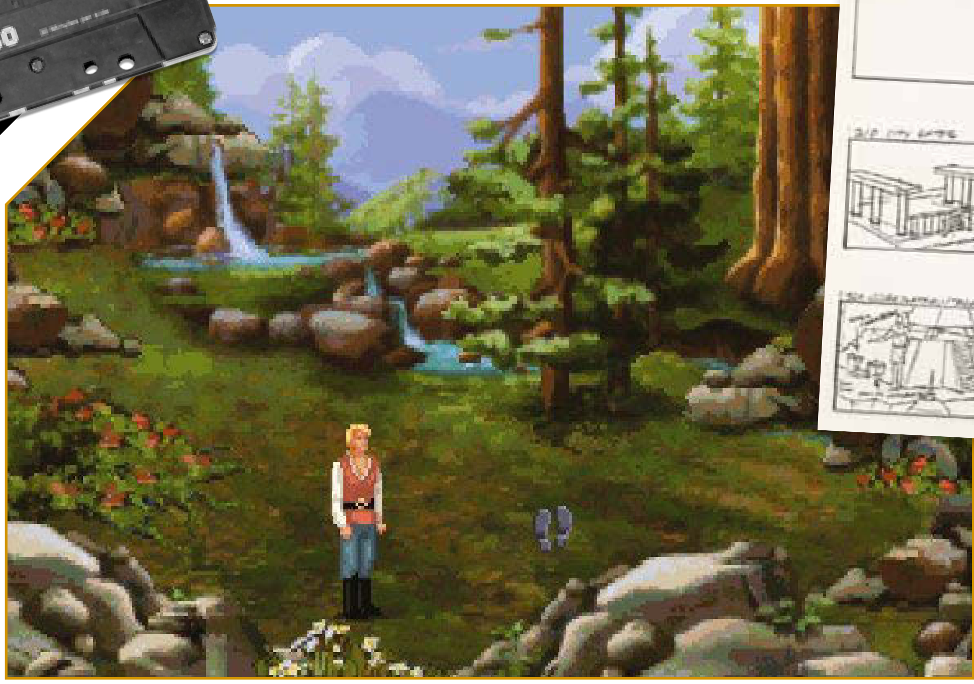
■ Some love it, some hate it, but you can be sure that no one forgets it. *Phantasmagoria* is infamous for its wonky FMV sequences, unflinching depictions of violence and hammy script. It also cost $4.5 million to make. And though some territories, like Australia, didn't have the stomach to sell it, that didn't matter - *Phantasmagoria* shipped over a million copies, standing stall as Sierra's bestselling title, for better or worse.



GABRIEL KNIGHT 3
1999

■ With the new millennium on the horizon, Sierra made the decision to utilise a 3D engine with one of its most popular IPs – *Gabriel Knight* – to revive the flagging adventure genre. But despite a gripping story, the engine couldn't keep pace. Plus, the excellent *Grim Fandango* had been released by LucasArts a year earlier, setting the benchmark insurmountably high.





» [PC] *Quest For Glory 4* got two releases: one in 1993 for MS-DOS, and a 'talkie' version in 1994, released on Windows – this is from the latter.



» The artists working on Quest For Glory 3 drew on Egyptian influences when sketching the city of Tarna.

profitability. Frustrated, the Coles left to work on *Shannara* at Legend Entertainment.

Despite Ken's exacting standards, Sierra was an exciting place to work. "There were no rules," Christy Marx recalls. "You learned by doing. It was a brand-new industry and everyone was picking it up as they went."

Christy joined Sierra in 1988 and would go on to design two adventure games, *Conquests Of Camelot: The Search For The Grail* (1989) and *Conquests Of The Longbow: The Legend Of Robin Hood* (1992), both based on real events in history. She was contracted to do a third title, but left after growing tired of Sierra's hardball negotiations. However, she departed with no regrets. "It was a lot of fun working there. I loved the people. I loved the whole process."

For all its idiosyncrasies, Sierra truly believed in fostering creative talent. When a young programmer named Jane Jensen joined the company, she slotted into the newly-formed Writers' Block where she could stretch her fingers in the storytelling job she had always wanted. It was a productive environment. Sierra was upping its professionalism and bringing in heavy-hitters like Emmy-winner Bill Davis to creatively direct. Jensen, inspired by this atmosphere, became one of the company's finest writers of all.

It was an inauspicious start. She crafted dialogue for *Police Quest III: The Kindred*, released in 1991 and wrote the booklet housed inside the box. Then she was picked by Roberta Williams to spearhead *King's Quest VI* (1992). Roberta was a reclusive figure who worked from home, leaving the long grinding hours at the office to her husband, but she nonetheless possessed a surgeon's attention to detail. *King's Quest VI* shipped 400,000 copies in its first week and Jane was rewarded with a project of her own to tackle. The result? A paranormal detective named Gabriel Knight.

"Ken really believed in a visionary behind a project," Jane says, "and that meant giving an artist leeway to create their vision without letting middle management constantly questioning things. And he would say, 'I'm giving you completely free reign, but if the game doesn't sell, you're out.'"

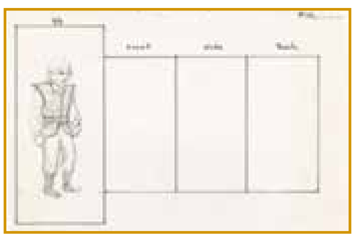
Jane worked with famed voice actors like Tim Curry and *Star Wars*' Mark Hamill to bring *Gabriel Knight* to life, and it sold so well on its 1993 debut Sierra decided to up the ante with its sequel, *The Beast Within*. Jane directed the sequel in full-motion video. Critics were impressed.

Yet in 1996, shortly after Jane was riding high on the success of her second directorial effort, Ken Williams sold Sierra to CUC International. It was a move designed to safeguard the company's future, but the new suits who swept through the halls of the Oakhurst office cared more about making money than helping creativity shine. 50 per cent of the workforce was laid off and the remaining team was yanked off to Seattle, leaving a skeleton crew behind with only the Yosemite National Park for company. Sierra was becoming a publishing house and it ended up publishing the IP that heralded Sierra's departure from adventure titles: a little first-person shooter by the name of *Half-Life*.

Jane Jensen was there right until the end, pulling teeth to get *Gabriel Knight 3* shipped after three or four years of painful graft. "In *Gabriel Knight* and *Gabriel Knight 2*, the team were so passionate, but now Ken and Roberta had left, and management didn't believe in it [*Gabriel Knight 3*]." This happened despite the fact Sierra had introduced a brand-new 3D engine.

The Coles also found themselves suddenly back in demand. The new directionless Sierra was looking to

THE DNA OF SIERRA ON-LINE



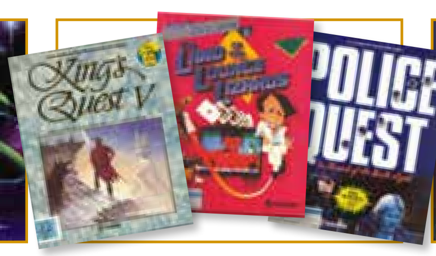
PRESSURE

■ Ken Williams was an unusual taskmaster. He was willing to give his game designers almost total freedom, but it was best you showed him something good when he came calling. Ken wasn't averse to axing underperforming staff, which meant the pressure was on for all involved. Despite this (or perhaps because of this), Sierra's output was outrageous.



REMAKES

■ Not merely content to create new IPs at every turn, Sierra took the step to entirely remake its best-loved franchises in its new SCI engine. These included *King's Quest*, *Leisure Suit Larry*, *Police Quest*, *Quest For Glory* and *Space Quest*. The VGA remakes of these games featured 256-colour graphics and full mouse integration for easier control.



EYE-CATCHING BOXES

■ Who doesn't miss the game boxes of old? These chunky behemoths were half the reason you bought the games at all, if only to stick your nose inside and see what was housed alongside your floppy disks. To fill the otherwise-empty space in the box, Sierra would produce elaborate manuals, books and supporting material alongside its beautiful box art.



HUMOUR

■ Before the invasion of po-faced drama, games used to be funny. That was partly necessitated by the fact that graphics weren't very good, which meant humour was a better fit for the image on the screen. Look no further than the *Space Quest* series, where the hilariously inept Roger Wilco faces off against the galaxy's most dangerous super criminal – and somehow prevails.

> **"Ken really believed in a visionary behind a project"**
> Jane Jensen

get into the MMO space and the Coles were asked to rejoin and make something happen. They had three months. "What mechanisms have you got for quests?" Corey enquired about the MMO. "Nothing," was the answer. "You know, you gotta put tools in for this sort of stuff," Corey cautioned. "Well, what about *Quest For Glory 5* then?" came the answer.

Quest For Glory 5 (which debuted in 1998) was duly made, but it would need an entire article of its own to unpack. The Coles toiled with three different engines and had to throw away all their artwork on three separate occasions. The Sierra ship was suddenly rudderless, and it was beginning to sink.

In retrospect, Ken's departure marked the beginning of the end. Sierra was a company irrevocably modelled in his image: passionate, chaotic and product-driven. Ken did not tolerate laziness, nor did he accept sloppy work and yet he had the foresight to let people get on with what they did best. Even when money was tight.

In the mid-Eighties, Ken was struggling with severe cashflow issues but he didn't jump ship. He pulled his programmers aside and gave them an advance against future royalties, minus a salary. Now independent contractors, these talented coders could make more money than their wildest dreams if their products sold. In 1987, one such coder struck gold. Al Lowe set out to make a comedy game about sex and named it *Leisure Suit Larry* in the *Land of the Lounge Lizards*.

The game's star, Larry Laffer, needed to get laid. The problem? Larry was a dinosaur – like an embryo sprung from the lab in Jurassic Park. Your goal was to navigate him through virgin waters.

"Larry was a product of the times," Al remembers wistfully. "He was ten years out of date. Now he's 40 years out of date." Several sequels were commissioned, and both Al and his creation remain two of the most enduring memories in Sierra's history.

Ken's decision to produce a game about a lovable loser sums up his attitude to game-making: you needed to create products that varied in tone and flavour, but importantly, they needed to be good. Look no further than Christy Marx's *Conquests Of The Longbow*, the effervescent *Space Quest 4: Roger Wilco And The Time Rippers*; *Leisure Suit Larry III: Passionate Patti And The Pulsating Pectorals*, the brooding *Quest For Glory: Shadows Of Darkness*; Gabriel Knight and its sequels – the list goes on.

Ultimately, the Sierra story is one of well-orchestrated chaos. Ken Williams gave rise to a company that was loose enough to embrace risk, but fastidious enough to care about quality. Looking back, the man with the moustache was the perfect foil for his creative team: an exacting technician who demanded product on time, but was more than willing to let people have fun. There are stories of hot tub parties, beer-soaked Fridays and even a nude advertising campaign featuring Roberta. But most of all, Sierra On-Line was about passionate people making products they loved, come hell or high water. *

Special thanks to the Coles, Christy Marx, Jane Jensen and Al Lowe for taking this trip down memory lane with us.



» [PC] At the end of *Space Quest III*, Ken meets the Two Guys From Andromeda and hires them. Space janitor Roger isn't quite so lucky.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

THE COLES

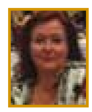


■ Lori and Corey Cole left Sierra after *Shadows Of Darkness* and made *Shannara* for Legend Entertainment. They returned to finish *Quest for Glory 5* and then enjoyed a phase at an online poker company. Today, they're working on their own *Quest for Glory*-inspired follow-up, *Hero U*, which was successfully kickstarted. You can find out more at www.hero-u.com.

CHRISTY MARX

■ After making two Sierra games, Christy headed off to seize other opportunities. She developed and edited a half-hour animated series of *Conan The Adventurer*, wrote for the Nineties sci-fi show *Babylon 5*, created a proof of concept called *Hypernauts* and then spent six years at the online videogame company Zynga. Christy has also penned a book, entitled *Writing For Animations, Comics And Games*. She's in talks with the publisher to do a second edition, and has opportunities on the table with several game developers at this time.

JANE JENSEN

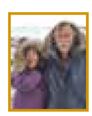


■ Jane now works as an author, writing predominantly under the pseudonym Eli Easton. She's occasionally dabbled in game-making, first with *Gray Matter* (2006), then with a 20th anniversary remake of the original *Gabriel Knight*. You can find out more about modern-day *Gabriel Knight* at www.gabrielknight20th.com.

AL LOWE

■ Al Lowe created *Leisure Suit Larry Reloaded* in 2013, a collaboration between Reply Games and Larry's IP holder, Codemasters. It updates every aspect of the 1987 classic and introduces contemporary humorous touches. Al is now retired, but spends his time maintaining the Al Lowe Humour Site, housed at www.allowe.com. He's been running it since 1998, and still sends out a daily joke to his many subscribers.

KEN AND ROBERTA WILLIAMS



■ After selling Sierra, Ken and Roberta retired in 1997 and now spend much of their time on their 68-foot Nordvahn trawler. Ken has written three books about boating, while Roberta returned to game design, lending her expertise to the Facebook game *Odd Manor* in 2014. That same year, she and her husband were honoured with the Industry Icon Award. Ken maintains www.kensblog.com.



COPY PROTECTION

■ In a bid to thwart pirates, Sierra came up with cute ways of catching you out. Players without the manual for the *Colonel's Bequest*, for instance, had no hope of identifying a fingerprint displayed on the screen. Al Lowe's *Leisure Suit Larry* series famously demanded you answer a series of multiple choice questions to prove your age. 30 years on, they're actually pretty tricky.



A HEALTHY RIVALRY

■ Sierra and LucasArts (also known as LucasFilm Games) were the two biggest makers of adventure games in the world. A healthy rivalry developed between the two companies. "Some of the best games came out of LucasFilm and we had a great deal of respect for them," Lori Cole recalls. LucasFilm Games was based three hours away, in San Francisco.



» The *Space Quest* franchise parodies the likes of *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* and introduced hero Roger Wilco.



RASPUTIN

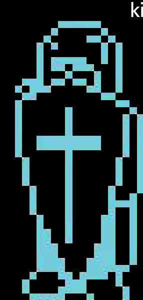
IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** FIREBIRD
- » **DEVELOPER:** PAUL HIBBARD
- » **RELEASED:** 1985
- » **PLATFORM:** SPECTRUM, C64, AMSTRAD
- » **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

After codeveloping the Spectrum hit Buggy Blast, Paul Hibbard went solo for his next project. Paul tells Rory Milne how he combined knights, puzzles and isometric graphics to create Rasputin

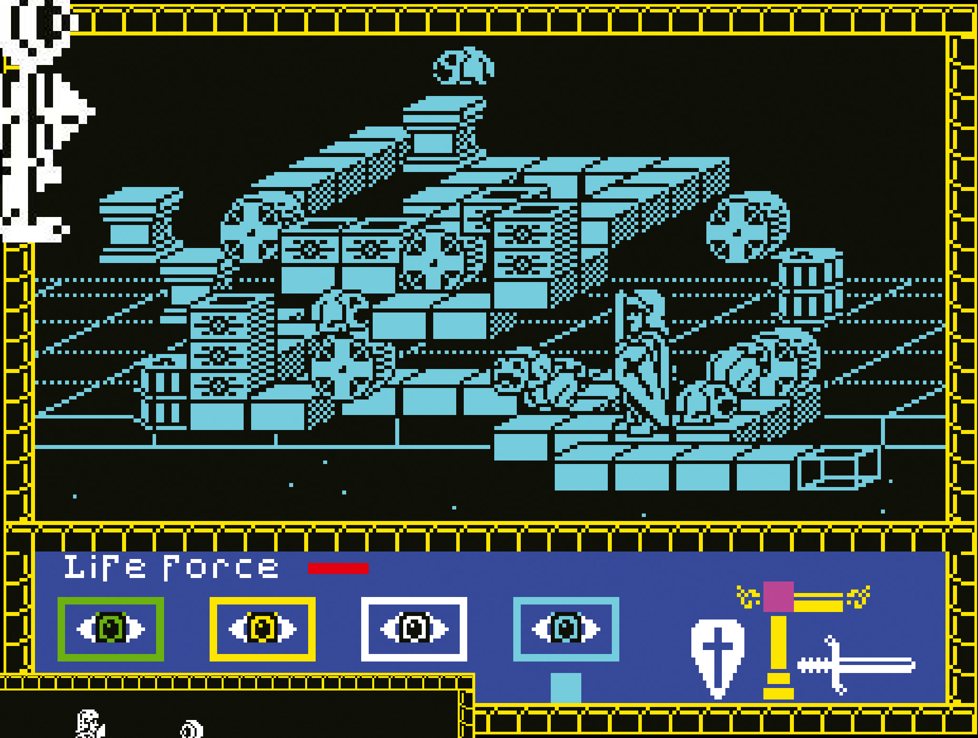
Like many Eighties game devs, Paul Hibbard started off as one half of a double act. His debut was the well received into-the-screen shooter *Buggy Blast*, which he cocreated with his brother-in-law David Lowe, but as the designer explains, his second game would be a solo project. "After we finished *Buggy Blast*, Dave decided he wanted to go back to his music career. So I was left to think up something on my own. Because platform games were about jumping up and down – and across – I decided it would be much more interesting to jump into a 3D screen. I started using the same sort of perspective as *Buggy Blast*, but I decided it was far too ambitious, so I changed the way I was approaching it."

The approach Paul took culminated in a plan for an isometric title themed around childhood memories of medieval knights, which the designer subsequently pitched to the publisher of his first game. "When I was a kid, it was Ivanhoe and Sir Lancelot, and they had a sword and shield. So that's why it was originally called *Crusader* – because [the hero] was going to fight evil with his sword and shield. I'd got to know Tony Rainbird at Firebird very well, and so I just took my idea into him. I presented a couple of static screens and talked him through it. He signed the game based on that. The guy who was running Firebird at the time said: 'What about calling it *Rasputin*?' – because he had been reading a book about him. So that's how the Rasputin character came about."

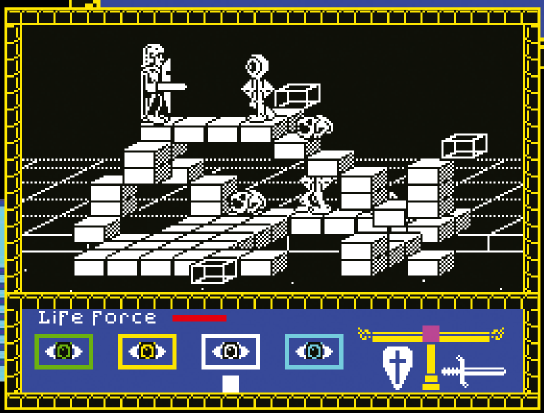


With a contract in place, Paul got to work on adapting his armoured hero and the legendary mad monk Rasputin into bitmap form. "I tended to use graph paper because it was an isometric thing, so you could get an idea of depth. It was a very weird kind of place to put your head in. It was a bit complex trying to get the shield working with the sword, having fights and jumping from platform to platform."

Designs of disturbing minions followed, including a Cyclops inspired by Sixties artwork. "The intension was to make them look bizarre. I remember the eyeballs. There was a Beatles track, and there was a



» [ZX Spectrum] Some stages in *Rasputin* are infested with foes that prove extremely difficult to dispatch.



» [ZX Spectrum] Bizarre eyeball-headed creatures and rabbits with skulls for heads attack Rasputin's crusader.

cartoon that went with it – an eyeball thing – and I thought that would look brilliant in a game."

But as Paul shifted from designing characters to devising levels, *Rasputin* began to consume his every waking moment, which resulted in an innovative mapping experiment. "I lay in bed at night thinking about rooms – I became quite obsessed. I decided I wanted to have a map of how they went together and where the doors took you. I started off using my kid's Lego to do a 3D map – but I soon threw that idea away because it was far too complex, and went back to drawings."

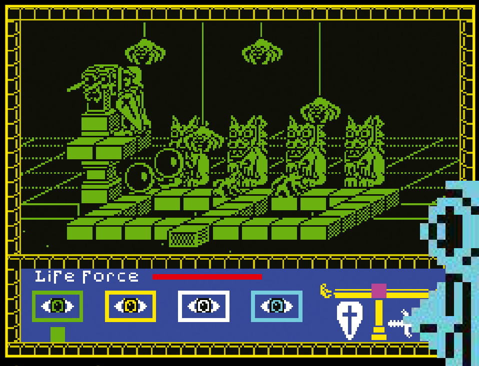
One aspect of *Rasputin* that remained complex, however, was the title's emerging gameplay, which coupled merciless foes with logistically challenging puzzles. "At the time, it probably seemed very simple," Paul reasons. "But it's a bit like an author writing a book and getting so far into it that he can't see the wood for the trees. I had nobody to bounce this stuff off, and that was the danger of working by yourself. I'd very occasionally go down the pub and talk to people, but they'd all think I was crazy!"

Infrequent outings aside, the designer gave his full attention to *Rasputin*, but working around the clock for an entire year ultimately took its toll. "At the end of *Rasputin*, I remember going out to celebrate that I'd finished it on time. I sat with a couple friends, and I didn't have anything to talk about because all I did was programming. I hadn't been watching television, I hadn't been watching the news, so basically I had no conversation whatsoever. I thought: 'I can't go on like this.'"

But despite Paul's hard work and sacrifice, publishing and distribution problems meant that *Rasputin* wasn't released until months after its glowing reviews had appeared. "It was supposed to come out with Firebird's 'Hot' range. I'm not sure if all of the other 'Hot' games weren't finished, but at least one wasn't, so *Rasputin* was delayed. Then when the game went out, one of the biggest distributors in the country went bankrupt. There were literally thousands and thousands of my game sitting in its warehouse that weren't distributed and effectively disappeared."

Paul is surprised to hear that people are still enjoying his game, and argues that *Rasputin* was as good as he could have made it. "I'm amazed that it's still being played. The crusader's animation is poor compared to some of the other animation – I would like to change that. But remembering the size of memory and the speed of the machines, it's not that easy. And the trouble is, how can you compare it to what you could do nowadays?" *

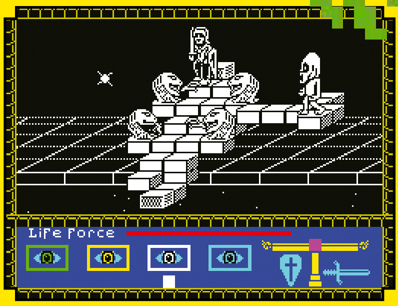
Many thanks to Paul for revisiting *Rasputin*.



» [ZX Spectrum] Rasputin's wraiths shoot fire in four directions, so careful timing is required to defeat them.

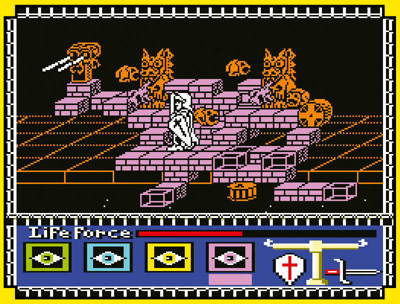
CONVERSION CAPERS

A run down of the other versions of Rasputin



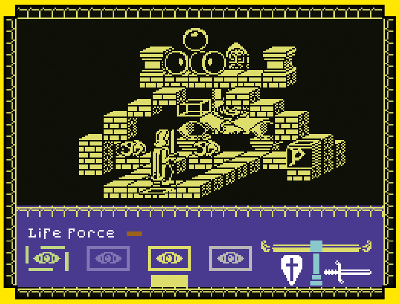
SPECTRUM 128K

■ A lot of Spectrum 128K titles just added a three-channel tune to a 48K game and called it a day, but Paul Hibbard's 128K *Rasputin* has an extra 33 rooms, changing music and impressive speech samples. Paul's 128K *Rasputin* also introduces nightmarish ghouls and maniacal moon-faced creatures.



AMSTRAD CPC

■ The only downside to Paul's Amstrad conversion of *Rasputin* is that it runs fractionally slower than the original game. By way of compensation, the CPC port sports more colours and boasts better sound effects. In terms of gameplay, the Amstrad *Rasputin* plays identically to the Spectrum 48K title that it is based on.



COMMODORE 64

■ As with Paul's CPC port, LT Software's C64 *Rasputin* conversion lacks the original's speed but captures its design perfectly. However, the C64 *Rasputin* has great sound effects and by far the best music of any version of the game. Rob Hubbard's score is best described as traditional Russian music versus synth pop.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

VIDEOGAME ADAPTATIONS OF CLASSIC BOOKS



The Hobbit

■ PUBLISHER: **Melbourne House** ■ YEAR: **1982** ■ SYSTEM: **Various**

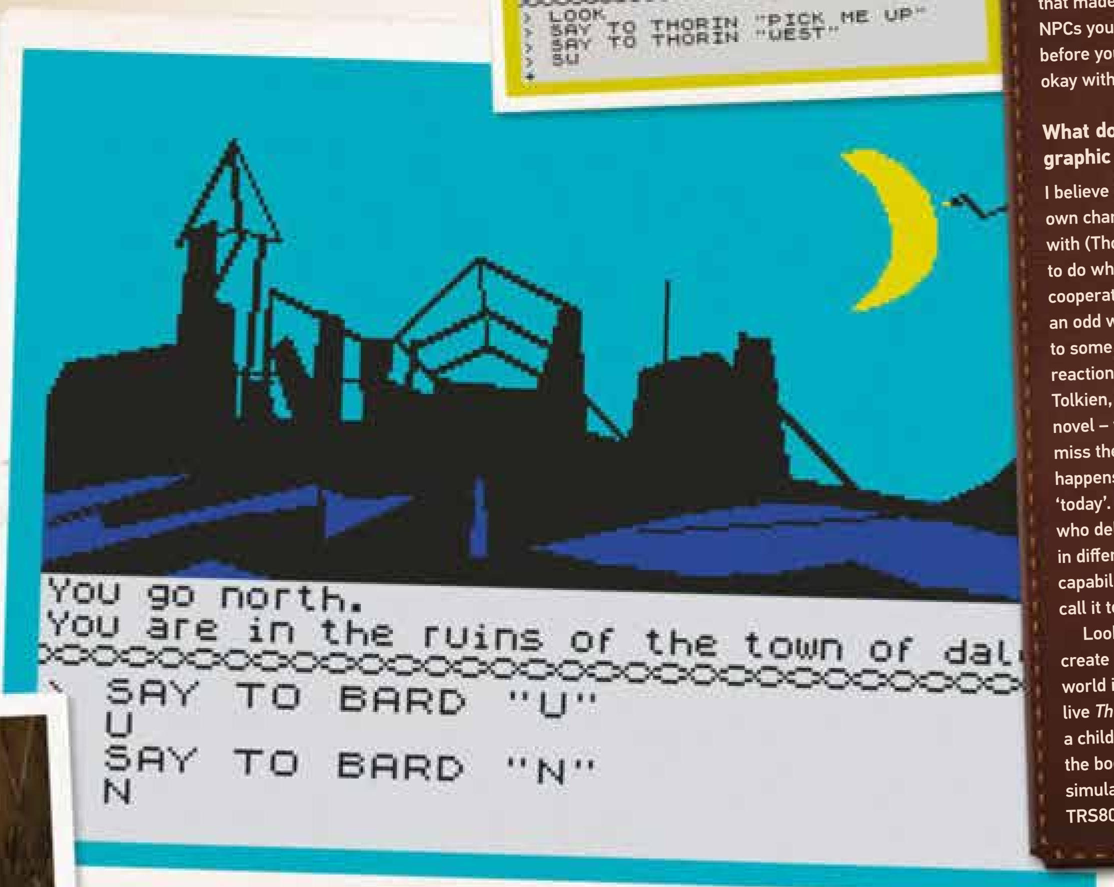
There have been many text adventure adaptations of novels, but perhaps none so innovative for its time as *The Hobbit*. The game used an unusually sophisticated parser that enabled you to type out complex sentences that other text adventures would be unable to interpret, increasing the scope of possibility when it came to how you interacted with the game's world. Then there was the physics system: objects and characters had a size and weight that would determine how they interacted with one another. Arguably the most notable innovations on show in *The Hobbit*, however, were those systems that combined to help make the world feel alive. The game ran in real time – which writer Veronika Megler tells us was initially implemented as a joke to acknowledge players that had remained idle for a period of time – with characters moving around the world acting independently as you played. They might pick up items, get in fights with one another, and so on.

There was a degree of randomness added to many of the actions you could perform, too, ensuring that the game was different every time you played. All of this combined to offer a sense of freedom and possibility that you don't tend to associate with a traditionally linear genre.

When it comes to its relationship to the book, the game pulls scenarios and characters from JRR Tolkien's famous novel, but couldn't follow its plot to the letter. Veronika did tell us, however, that she tried to capture the spirit of the original and didn't want to create alternate endings that "destroy the story arc that made the original novel work". "In *The Hobbit* game," she explains, "the alternative endings were either that the player died, or the mission became unachievable – and both of these are consistent with novel's premise."

"Looking back, I realise I was trying to create a whole-world simulation"







Veronika Megler

How Beam Software created a bestseller and innovated a genre



Where did the innovative ideas you included in the game come from?

Most of the ideas came from my reactions to the one adventure game I'd played prior to that: *Colossal Cave*, often called *Classic Adventure*. I played it obsessively until I'd made it through the game once, then I instantly lost interest. I was bored that it was the same each time you played it. So, I came up with alternatives, taking the 'troll' and the 'dragon', and turning them into full-fledged characters that could move around the game's locations, and that had a set of actions that represented their characters, and randomisation to make them less robotic. I decided that since they were all characters that they should 'play' the game too, so each time the player had a turn, each NPC would have a turn.

I added randomness in many places so the game played differently each time, even if the player did the same things. Initially, I was foiled by the fact that the 'random' function was actually pseudo-random; but after some experimentation Phil [Mitchell] was able to develop a truly random function. Sometimes that made the game unfinishable, as key NPCs you needed to cooperate with got killed before you could get to them. I decided I was okay with that. It made it more lifelike.

What do you think made *The Hobbit* graphic adventure a success?

I believe that having characters that had their own character quirks that you had to deal with (Thorin's ability and propensity to refuse to do what you asked him to), that you had to cooperate with, made the game addictive. In an odd way, the characters became 'friends' to some of the players. I've had a similar reaction when I finish reading an epic – a Tolkien, *Game Of Thrones* or a Robert Jordan novel – where I feel a sense of loss, that I miss the characters, miss finding out what happens to them next, what they're doing 'today'. Then there were a set of players who delighted in solving the game puzzles in different ways, in stretching the game's capabilities and its physics engine (as you'd call it today) to its limits.

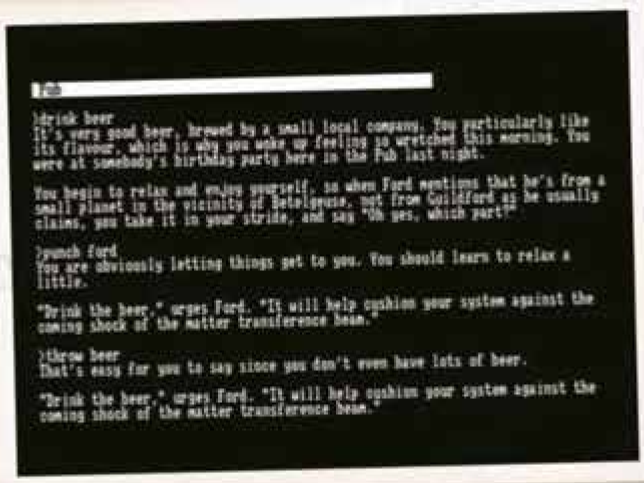
Looking back, I realise I was trying to create a whole-world simulation, a virtual world in which I could become part of and live *The Hobbit*'s adventure. Taking what as a child you imagine, that you're actually in the book, and building that out as a computer simulation of the book – in assembler, on a TRS80. That in itself was an adventure.



The Witcher

■PUBLISHER: **CD Projekt Red** ■YEAR: **2007** ■SYSTEM: **PC/Mac**

The mythology of the monster-hunting Witcher, Geralt, proved to be fertile ground for CD Projekt Red's hit RPG series. The opening for the first game, in which Geralt is discovered by fellow Witchers having lost all his memory, was based on a short story from the first of Andrzej Sapkowski's *Witcher* books, *The Last Wish*. There are plenty of differences between the games and books – Triss Merigold takes Yennefer's role as primary love interest in the first game, whereas her relationship with Geralt is nowhere near as significant in the books, for example. However, the first *Witcher* game and its follow-ups are still pretty faithful to the source material. As well as some storyline similarities, key towns and locations, like Kaer Morhen, monsters, like the Wyvern, mythology, factions, and a host of characters, are drawn from Sapkowski's novels.



The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy

■PUBLISHER: **Infocom**
■YEAR: **1984** ■SYSTEM: **Various**

Arguably the most obvious thing to do with a videogame novel adaptation in the Eighties was to make a text adventure out of it. *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* is one of many adaptations that took that approach. Using key commands such as 'look', 'take' and so on, you had to solve puzzles, sometimes within a set number of turns, to progress. The game followed the events of the book relatively faithfully and won praise for capturing Douglas Adams' off-the-wall style of humour. It was a big commercial success, despite some having some notoriously difficult puzzles – including 'the Babel Fish puzzle', which would leave the game in an unwinnable state if you got it wrong.

Dracula The Undead

■PUBLISHER: **Atari** ■YEAR: **1991** ■SYSTEM: **Atari Lynx**

Atari's interpretation of the *Dracula* myth opens with the original book's author, Bram Stoker, introducing himself as the narrator of the tale, flicking through the pages of his novel in an armchair sat by the fire as lightning outside pierces the darkness of the author's room. The opening is a brief, but faithful recounting of the novel's opening, in which a solicitor called Jonathan Harker makes his way to Dracula's castle and meets the infamous Count. The objective of this adventure game adaptation is to explore the castle, picking up items to help you as you search for a way to escape. The game abandons the story of the novel with your escape from the castle, mentioning nothing of Dracula's trip to England which forms the rest of Stoker's original tale.



Parasite Eve

■PUBLISHER: **Squaresoft** ■YEAR: **1998** ■SYSTEM: **PlayStation**

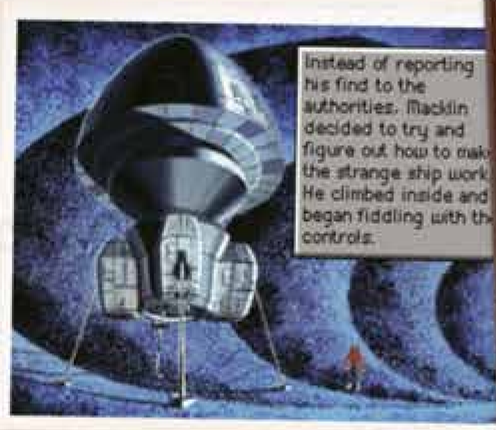
Square's well-renowned survival horror followed on from the events of the novel of the same name, using the book's idea that mitochondria, which are found in our cells, are all part of a dispersed organism called Eve, and are waiting for the right time to take over humans. The game is faithful to the novel only in so far as it follows that premise; the game tells its own story and is set in New York, rather than Japan, with the player talking on the role of NYPD office Aya Brea in her efforts to stop Eve. The game employs an RPG style combat system: you can move freely in combat to avoid enemy attacks, but must wait for a bar to charge to use your weapons and abilities, which can be improved by levelling up.



Gateway

■PUBLISHER: **Legend Entertainment House** ■YEAR: **1992** ■SYSTEM: **PC**

The premise of Fredrik Pohl's *Gateway* begs for an adaptation, full of possibility as it is. The novel is about an abandoned alien space station full of ships that its new human occupants barely understand. They know how to activate a ship, but they don't know where it will take them: to discoveries that make them rich, to danger, or to death. The game roughly follows the plot of the book, in which a poor prospector arrives on the station to try his luck and find his fortune, but also incorporates a storyline about an alien threat that was introduced in the original novel's sequels. The game takes the form of a graphic text adventure, tasking you with travelling to four alien planets in order to activate a cloaking device to hide humanity from discovery by a hostile alien race and avert their destruction.





"Personally, I was very invested in making sure my adventure games delivered as much as possible"

Glen Dahlgren

The man behind Gateway and Death Gate on videogame adaptations



What makes a novel a good fit for an adaptation?

I had a number of criteria in mind when examining a novel or series of books to determine if they were appropriate for a game translation:

- How popular is the property? If the licence brings enough fans with it, you can make almost anything work.
- How extensive is the world? This may be the key creative concern. A deep, rich world can give you lots of corners to build your own story, and a toolkit of characters, places, and history to pull from.
- How flexible is the author? It's important to determine how much creative freedom you're going to get, because you're going to have to make trade-offs.
- Does the licence overlap with any other concerns, and will be there any legal problems? This would be an issue for licences, like *The Lord Of The Rings*, that have spawned movies or TV shows. You have to know exactly what you can use, and what you have to stay away from.
- How excited is the designer about this property? Back at Legend, I turned down a number of book licences because I didn't like them. This isn't just because I would prefer to work on something I enjoyed; existing fans who play the game always know if the design doesn't respect the source material. The designer has to be just as passionate as the people playing, otherwise the whole experience comes off as fake, and true fans can smell it a mile away.

Does the relatively text-heavy nature of interactive fiction offer something you wouldn't get with another approach?

We had a saying back at Legend: 'Text is cheap'. Using text as the primary feedback for player actions gave us tons of flexibility. We could construct something elaborate, and then change it days before we shipped. Anything that had to be voice acted, drawn, animated, etc was expensive to produce, and got locked in months before we completed the game. Beyond that, the relationship between author and player was a lot more personal in games like those. No one – an artist, a voice actor, a sound engineer – got in the way of the author communicating directly to the player.

However, there's a lot to be said about the impact graphics, animation, sound effects, and voice acting had on the experience. Personally, I was very invested in making sure my adventure games delivered as much as possible on those fronts at the time. Naturally, today's games take those elements to an entirely different level, but at the time, we delivered powerful experiences that still resonate with the fans of the original properties. I still get mail from people playing those games today who love them!

The Saga Of Erik The Viking

■PUBLISHER: **Mosaic Publishing**
■YEAR: **1984** ■SYSTEM: **Various**



Erik The Viking, based on the children's book written by Terry Jones of Monty Python fame, was relatively typical of text adventures of the era, with a linear plot, simple commands and tricky puzzles. Characters and items from the book appear in the game, but it tells its own story.

Goosebumps: Escape From Horrorland

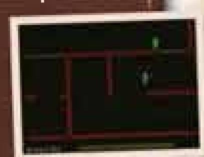
■PUBLISHER: **Dreamworks Interactive**
■YEAR: **1996** ■SYSTEM: **PC**



Escape To Horrorland is presented as a sequel to the *Goosebumps* book *One Day At Horrorland*. You explore the ghoulish theme park, Horrorland, with three characters from the book Lizzy, Luke and Clay, played by real actors, using simple point-and-click interactions to progress.

The Warlock Of Firetop Mountain

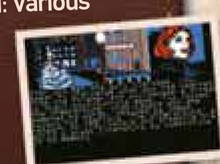
■PUBLISHER: **Puffin Books**
■YEAR: **1984** ■SYSTEM: **ZX Spectrum**



This adaptation bore little resemblance to the *Fighting Fantasy* book on which it was based, other than by name. It was an arcade-style adventure where you searched for treasure, fighting monsters with a sword and bow. Later *Fighting Fantasy* series adaptations better represented the stat and skill-based systems used in the books.

Fahrenheit 451

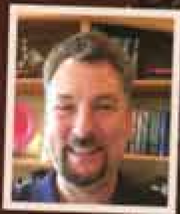
■PUBLISHER: **Trillium**
■YEAR: **1984** ■SYSTEM: **Various**



Ray Bradbury, who wrote the classic dystopian novel on which this game was based, had some involvement in the text adventure adaptation, writing the prologue and dialogue for 'Ray', an intelligent computer that appears in the story. It takes place five years after the book, continuing the story of Guy Montag.

David Mullich

How a classic short story became a classic game



How did the *I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream* adaptation come about?

I hadn't yet joined Cyberdreams during the early, conceptual phase of the game's development. What I can tell you is that the company was founded to develop videogames in collaboration with famous names in other creative fields who worked in the fantasy and science fiction genres.

The company's president, Pat Ketchum, knew Syd Meade, the industrial designer who designed the spinner vehicles for the film *Blade Runner*, and contracted him to design vehicles for the game *CyberRace*. He also licensed artwork from HR Giger, the artist who designed the aliens in the film *Alien*, for the game *Dark Seed*.

He apparently saw that Harlan Ellison would also be a good fit for the company's vision, and what better material to work with than the author's most famous short story?

Was it difficult making decisions on what had to be changed to make the book work as a game?

The challenge in adapting the story is that its depth is more in mood than plot, but to give the player a lot of choices to make in the game, there needs to be a very rich plot behind those choices. It was necessary to expand the story, and in dealing with that challenge, the game's original designer, David Sears, asked Harlan, 'Why did AM decide to torture these particular people out of the billions of others he obliterate?' And so they created backstories for each of the characters in the story and decided that the game would consist of adventure scenarios that would tell each backstory.

After the players play through each of these scenarios, they would return to the scenario of the original short story. However, based on the choices they made, they could experience different endings to the game.

Did you have different priorities because of the nature of this project than you would for others?

My main priority was to capture the crippling and bleak mood of the original story while still allowing players to feel that they could still be successful in the game. Another balancing act was between giving the player choices that mattered while still telling a story. So, what made this game different was that the choices provided different psychological insights into the characters rather than having different outcomes at the intermediate progression points.



I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream

■PUBLISHER: **Cyberdreams** ■YEAR: **1995** ■SYSTEM: **PC**

Authors are rarely closely involved with adaptations of their work, but *I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream* is an exception. Harlan Ellison collaborated as a designer on the videogame interpretation of his story along with David Mullich and David Sears. The game expands on the original story's premise of a rogue supercomputer endlessly torturing the few humans left that it hadn't murdered to create a game with five scenarios for each of the characters introduced in the original tale. The game uses a LucasArts style point and click interface; you click on verbs, like 'give', and then objects and the environment to solve puzzles and complete the twisted quests assigned to each character by the deranged supercomputer AM. Each of the scenarios plays on the psychological weaknesses and character flaws of the protagonist in question and does so with a degree of maturity and sophistication uncommon in the medium at the time. It was originally planned for *I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream* to be unbeatable, but that idea was scrapped and seven alternative endings that would be unlocked depending on how you played the final scene introduced instead.





"My main priority was to capture the crippling and bleak mood of the original story"



Ubik

■PUBLISHER: **Cryo Interactive** ■YEAR: **1998** ■SYSTEM: **PC/ PlayStation**

Philip K Dick's *Ubik* is a fantastic example of the author's reality-bending brand of paranoid, philosophically-inclined, science fiction. The book's protagonist, Joe Chip, works for an anti-psi company called Runticer Associates that protects their clients from spying and corporate espionage at the hand of psychics. You never actually see Joe and his colleagues going about their normal business in the novel – instead they end up trying to find out why reality is degenerating around them as they die, one by one. Cryo Interactive's adaptation does try to incorporate the novel's storyline, but makes Joe's day-to-day anti-psi work the focus through RTS mechanics that you use to lead your team in missions against your rivals Hollis, Inc, using their psychic powers and traditional weapons to do battle. Death is permanent for your recruits, so it's important to try and keep them alive to level up their abilities.



Dune

■PUBLISHER: **Virgin Games** ■YEAR: **1992** ■SYSTEM: **Various**

The videogame adaptation of *Dune* roughly follows the plot of Frank Herbert's famous sci-fi novel. The noble family Atreides is given stewardship of the planet Arrakis, the only source of a rare and valuable spice called Melange, and works to dominate the harvest and supply of the sought-after substance. An adventure-style component allows you to explore internal structures where you can talk to advisors, give orders, and recruit new allies. Complementing that is a top-down strategy element to manage the mining of Melange and to build the military force you will need to defeat your rivals. The game takes place in real time, with new story elements and gameplay options unlocked as time progresses. The game was well received both as an adaptation and as a game in its own right. It got a sequel, *Dune II*, which would prove to be incredibly influential on the RTS genre.

The Secret Diary Of Adrian Mole Aged 13¾

■PUBLISHER: **Mosaic Publishing** ■YEAR: **1984** ■SYSTEM: **Various**

The goal of *The Secret Diary Of Adrian Mole*, which is based on the successful satirical book of the same name, was to become as popular as possible. In each scenario, you would be presented with three options after reading a passage of text, which would determine what happens next.



Neuromancer

■PUBLISHER: **Mediagenic** ■YEAR: **1988** ■SYSTEM: **Various**

Credited as one of the originators of the cyberpunk genre, *Neuromancer*, William Gibson's novel about a group of hackers recruited by an unknown force to steal data on their behalf, is one of the most influential titles in sci-fi history. Given that we've seen so many cyberpunk-influenced games over the years, it certainly deserved its own adaptation. The game's story is loosely based on the novel, though it does feature key locations like Chiba City, familiar characters Ratz and The Finn, and even uses lines from the book. Part of the *Neuromancer* adaptation plays as a traditional adventure game – you use a point-and-click interface to move between locations, chat to NPCs and so on. The rest of the game takes place in a 3D-grid world. Here you can try and hack data using abilities, the goal being to take down a server before it finishes you first.

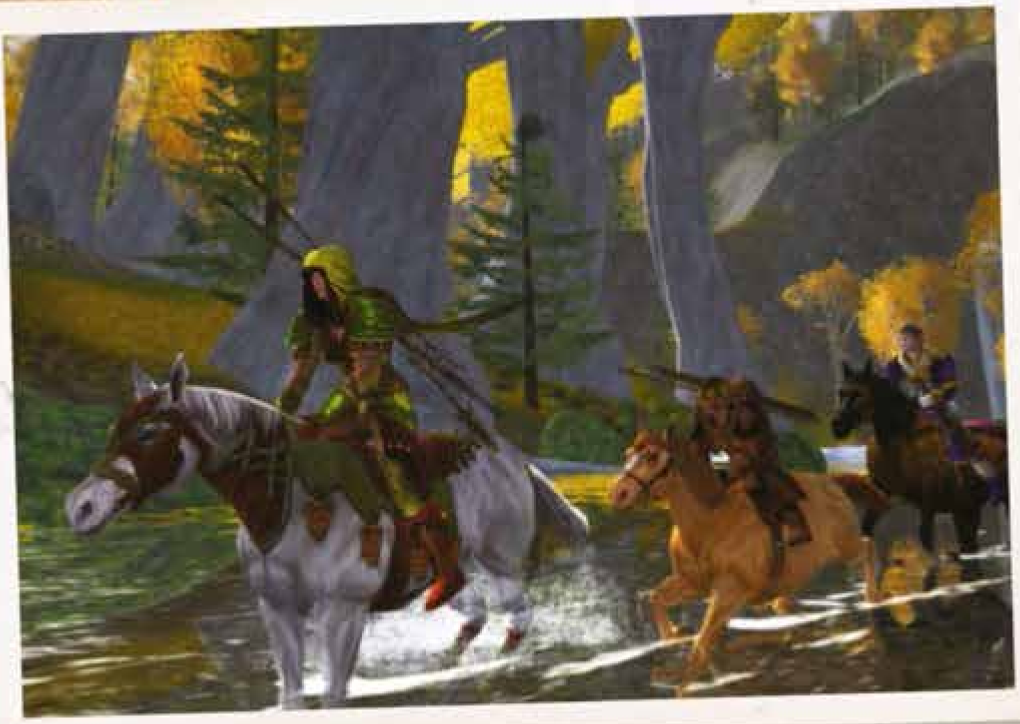


Betrayal At Krondor

■PUBLISHER: **Sierra On-Line** ■YEAR: **1993** ■SYSTEM: **PC**

Based on the *Riftwar* novels, *Betrayal At Krondor* drew on the fantasy world of Midkemia established in those books, but told its own story (which ended up being developed into a *Riftwar* novel called *Krondor: The Betrayal*). The game is credited for its influence on the evolution of the RPG genre thanks to an engaging plot, a decent turn-based combat system and its support of player freedom through skills that can be levelled up, dialogue trees and relatively unhindered exploration. It is fondly remembered for the locked chests littered throughout the world that could be opened by solving a riddle emblazoned on the lid.





The Lord Of The Rings Online

■PUBLISHER: Turbine, Inc ■YEAR: 2007 ■SYSTEM: PC

Though it clearly does take inspiration from Peter Jackson's *Lord Of The Rings* movies in terms of its visuals, *Lord Of The Rings Online* primarily draws from JRR Tolkien's books when it comes to the form of its world and the cultures that live within it. For the most part, the game delivers exactly what you expect from an MMO: you create an avatar that can be levelled up as you explore the world and complete quests, and can team up with other players to form 'Fellowships' to undertake quests together. The game has received loads of updates over the years, adding new quests, items and regions, including famous locations like Moria. In fact, the game only just reached Mordor in July of 2017! The game includes a surprisingly in-depth music system intended to reflect Tolkien's frequent referencing of music in his books. Your keyboard can be used to play notes that span three octaves on instruments like the lute, clarinet and bagpipes.

Discworld Noir

■PUBLISHER: GT Interactive ■YEAR: 1999 ■SYSTEM: PC, PlayStation

The best of the point-and-click *Discworld* trilogy, *Noir*, as its name suggests, parodies the conventions of the noir genre. You play as a detective called Lewton, hired by two clients to investigate two seemingly disconnected missing persons' cases. There are some traditional adventure game item puzzles, but much of the game is based around collecting clues in your notebook that can be used to pressure suspects into giving you information when you interrogate them. *Noir* is a curious case of a videogame adaptation in that it incorporates influences from a number of novels. Ostensibly, it's based on Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series. However, the game only uses those books to draw on style, locales, characters, and lore, not for plot. Story-wise, *Noir* draws on classic hardboiled crime novels like Raymond Chandler's *Farewell, My Lovely* and Dashiell *Hammett's The Maltese Falcon*. As it moves towards its conclusion, you'll see plenty of HP Lovecraft in there too!





Sherlock Holmes: Consulting Detective

■PUBLISHER: GT Interactive ■YEAR: 1999 ■SYSTEM: PC, PlayStation

There are three cases to be solved in *Consulting Detective*. The story of each case is told via live-action FMVs in which we see Holmes interviewing persons of interest. By visiting different locations, listening to Holmes' interviews and reading through newspapers, you collect clues that can then be used to answer a judge's questions and, if you answer correctly, solve the case. The cases aren't directly based on any from Arthur Conan Doyle's novels – it's really only the Holmes character – though the discerning Holmes fan might spot one or two similarities.



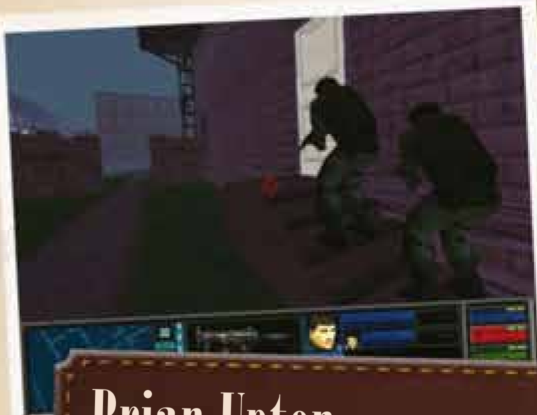
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six

■PUBLISHER: **Red Storm Entertainment** ■YEAR: **1998** ■SYSTEM: **Various**

On its debut, *Rainbow Six* was a different kind of shooter. The focus was on realism, tactics and stealth, not on spectacle, speed and explosions. Each mission would begin with you choosing your operatives and their equipment, then planning routes and orders for AI-controlled squads. When it came to executing your plan, the fact that one bullet could drop you during the operation gave it a tense atmosphere and made successful execution all the more satisfying.

Rainbow Six is a unique example of a book adaptation in that the book hadn't been started when Red Storm Entertainment began making it. Designer Brian Upton tells us that the original plan was to create new IPs that fit within the Clancy brand. "The entire core team was at a retreat along with Tom, and we generated hundreds of ideas," he recalls. "The idea for *Rainbow Six* originally came from a programmer named Mustafa Thamer." Tom ended up liking the idea so much that he decided to make a novel based on the game's plot. The novel was finished before the game, so character names and mission briefings were then changed to bring the game's plot closer in line with the story in the book.





"We weren't borrowing particular details from the book – because for most of development the book didn't exist yet"

Brian Upton

Laying the foundations for a series that's still going strong



How did the Clancy link influence the game's design?
We spent a lot of time early on talking about what made a book or movie feel 'Clancy-esque'. The game needed to feel realistic, but not like a simulation. It should be fun and exciting, while still giving the player the sense that they were learning inside information about how a real team like Rainbow would operate. It should have lots of accurate technical details – real weapons, real equipment, real locations. It should feel very matter-of-fact and straightforward, nothing flashy or over-the-top. We weren't borrowing particular details from the book – because for most of development the book didn't exist yet – but we did try very hard to capture the spirit of Tom Clancy's own writing style.

For example, Tom put us in touch with firearm trainers at Heckler & Koch and the team spent a day running through live-fire drills to get a sense of how real-world operatives would move through a space and control it. We didn't include the ability for the player to jump, because our interviews with experts revealed that they tried to always maintain a stable firing platform during room clearing, and jumping throws your aim off. I still remember asking one of our advisers what he would do if he entered a room and a couch was blocking his way. 'Uh … I'd walk around it,' he said.

Was using realism a deliberate attempt to differentiate the game from other shooters?
The decision to make the game very realistic just came naturally from our ideas about what the Clancy brand implied. We never gave much thought to how the game would be received. We just tried to create the most entertaining experience we could while staying true to Tom's brand. We didn't deliberately reject what other games were doing, we just tried to discover our own original fun. For example, I got the idea for the targeting reticule and the one-shot-kill mechanic because I was annoyed by getting killed by a team member who had better twitch reflexes than I did. I started thinking about how to make a shooter that would reward strategic thinking instead of razor-sharp eye-hand coordination. When we mocked it up and tried it, we loved it, and it felt like it did a better job of capturing the feel of real-world firearm combat. We didn't set out to invent a combat model that was deliberately different, and we didn't worry about how it would be received. We just tried to stay true to our original vision and make good design choices within that framework.

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home

METAMOQESTER

DEVELOPER: **BANPRESTO** YEAR: **1995** GENRE: **FIGHTING**

■ Of the many things the Nineties gave us, forgotten fighting games by lesser-known developers are amongst our favourites. It's fascinating to watch how every company under the sun tried to jump into a hot genre in the wake of *Street Fighter II*'s success – some produced blatant clones, others introduced innovations that secured their place in the market, and then there are the complete oddballs. *Metamoqester* is one of those oddballs.

Metamoqester invites players to take on a series of ridiculously powerful boss characters in regular fighting game fashion. These bosses are so powerful, in fact, that the game will happily let two players co-operate to take down the big beasts. You're given a choice of three characters for this task – the agile Yukihime, all-rounder Tenchimaru and powerhouse Kaiohmaru, each with their own special moves. Instead of fighting in rounds, you get three lives as standard and only have to beat each boss once.

As you can see from the screenshots, *Metamoqester* is an extremely attractive game that could hold its own against any mid-Nineties fighting game – the sprite art is excellent, and the bosses are absolutely bloody enormous. It's just as pretty in motion, though it does suffer slightly from excessive screen shaking caused by enemy attacks. It plays well, too, although we'd recommend always playing with a friend. The bosses are deliberately unbalanced, and while you can always continue, you can only keep your progress if the other player is still alive – dying alone means you'll restart the stage if you continue.

Metamoqester was not a smash hit in arcades, and it's not hard to figure out why. Apart from the fact that the title is hard to remember and tells you literally nothing about the game, it was a game at odds with what made the genre successful. One of the major factors in the success of the one-on-one fighting genre was that it fostered competition between players, generating revenue through rematches and winner-stays-on challenges – something *Metamoqester* failed to offer. As a result, it's no surprise that the game never graced home consoles.

Of course, yesterday's near miss is today's hidden gem, and *Metamoqester* is a unique experience. If you're tired of regular fighting games, grab a friend and try it out.



■ Two players can fight a single boss. Though you both start on the left of the screen, there's no need to stay there – you can trap the boss in the middle.

■ As is standard for the genre, you have access to various attack strengths. Kaiohmaru's strong attack, seen here, is slow but utterly devastating.



■ Every character has special attacks – here you can see Tenchimaru (or rather, the spirit representing him) dashing sword-first towards Gengoroh.

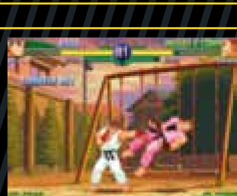
■ Boss designs are pretty outlandish. Gengoroh, the first stage boss, is a Japanese demon that appears to be part-house. It can breathe fire too.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 3

1998

■ There's nothing quite like *Metamoqester* out there, so the closest you'll get on a console is this game's Dramatic Battle mode. Like *Metamoqester*, it allows you to team up with a second player to fight one powerful boss character, but they're just high-powered versions of the regular bosses.



CHASE BOMBERS

DEVELOPER: **TAITO** YEAR: **1994** GENRE: **RACING**

■ **It's fair to say that *Chase Bombers* is not a game that thrives on originality.** To begin with, you'd be forgiven for thinking it was an *OutRunners* clone – the game features a similarly eclectic choice of vehicles, from a sports car and a truck to something that looks suspiciously like a Volkswagen Beetle. However, each race takes place on a regular circuit, and it's here that the game's other influences become apparent.

Instead of a time limit, the game employs a moving position cut-off like *F-Zero*, forcing you to fight to the front of the pack or face elimination. Additionally, much like *Super Mario Kart*, you can pick up weapons to fire at your rivals. Because it's an arcade game, *Chase Bombers* presents a more skill-focused take on that system – you have to choose your own weapon at weapon gates, and there are attacks that home in on enemy racers, nor any that hit all of them. *Chase Bombers* is a fine game that's certainly worth trying out, but it doesn't have any ideas of its own to demonstrate, nor does it do anything outstanding with the ones that it borrows.



» [Arcade] Chase Bombers rates you on accuracy after each game, so firing weapons on corners is a bad idea.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

OUTRUNNERS

1993

■ The *Mario Kart* arcade games are a lot like *Chase Bombers*, but never received conversions. The game does borrow much of its aesthetic from *OutRunners*, which received a Mega Drive conversion. Of course, that wasn't a particularly great conversion. Just play *Super Mario Kart* instead?

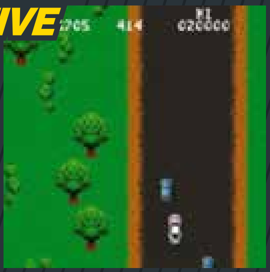


CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

SPY HUNTER

1983

■ It's not hard to see what inspired *Top Secret*, and *Spy Hunter* is still good fun today. It's more linear and emphasises reactions over strategy, but that's not necessarily a bad thing – just be aware that it's not going to be a one for one replacement for Exidy's game.



TOP SECRET

DEVELOPER: **EXIDY** YEAR: **1986** GENRE: **SHOOT-'EM-UP**

■ It's astonishing to think that *Top Secret* was released in 1986, because it looks incredibly rough for the mid-Eighties. Despite some cool speech clips that help create atmosphere, it looks more like it could have been released about five years prior. However, there's a fun game lurking beneath the surface here, something like *Spy Hunter* with added depth.

You're a spy, driving a car kitted out with all the latest gadgets – a machine gun, fireballs, lasers, missiles and more. You'll need them, too, because you'll come under attack from all manner of enemies, including roadside cannons and other cars. These can naturally be taken out with your weapons, but each has limited ammo and is assigned to its own individual button, so you'll need to keep track of what items you're picking up. Although you're always travelling up the screen, your car can turn through a full 360 degrees, and you'll need this ability to stay on the road and avoid obstacles.

While *Top Secret* would definitely have benefited from more exciting graphics, the game design holds up well, so it's a real shame that this one never came home.



» [Arcade] Not every weapon is front-firing – these fireballs shoot out sideways.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

RANGER MISSION

DEVELOPER: **SAMMY** YEAR: **2004** GENRE: **LIGHTGUN SHOOTER**

■ *Ranger Mission* is a relatively standard military-themed lightgun game, which unfortunately styles itself as a 'field training exercise' – a conceit which robs the game of any sense of drama or urgency. Each stage contains a series of objectives that must be met, including taking enemies out in the correct order, shooting down a quota of enemies, and causing as much damage as possible with a single shot.

There's a weirdly non-violent vibe to *Ranger Mission*. Enemies become wireframe and fade away when shot, and you technically can't die – getting shot only incurs a time penalty. You can only fail by missing objectives or running out of time. As a result, there's a certain sterility to the experience. The constant interruption of new objectives is a pain and you certainly never feel like you're fighting for survival, so the game just doesn't inspire the same sort of adrenaline rush as its peers. Luckily, *Ghost Squad* arrived later in the same year and did a far better job with the modern warfare theme.

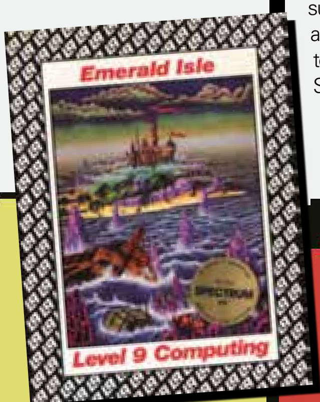


THE MAKING OF EMERALD ISLE

FANS OF INTERACTIVE FICTION WILL HAVE ALL PLAYED A LEVEL 9 ADVENTURE. SHAUN ABBOTT WENT ONE FURTHER – HE WROTE ONE. HE TELLS MARTYN CARROLL THE STORY OF EMERALD ISLE

IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** LEVEL 9
- » **DEVELOPER:** SHAUN ABBOTT, LEVEL 9
- » **RELEASED:** 1985
- » **PLATFORM:** VARIOUS
- » **GENRE:** TEXT ADVENTURE



You're standing in a village green. Several cottages skirt the green to the north, while to the south lies the local inn. It is dusk. Next to you is a red phone box. The phone is ringing. What next?

This very question was posed to 18-year-old Shaun Abbott back in 1984. His response was to quickly grab the phone as he knew that the caller was Pete Austin of famed adventure publisher Level 9. Shaun had submitted an adventure game design to Level 9 on spec and he was about to find out whether the firm wanted to publish it. "I remember booking a phone call," says Shaun. "My parents didn't have a telephone back then, so somehow we arranged to take the call from our village phone box in Bittaford, Devon. That's when I was made a cash offer and accepted it. I received a one-time payment of £1,000, which I thought was a fortune."

It's fitting that *Emerald Isle* should lead Shaun to his 'fortune', as he was heavily inspired by the early text adventures that typically involved an audacious quest for treasure. His interest in interactive fiction, and the computers that permitted it, began when he was a pupil at Ivybridge Comprehensive in Devon. "My school was fairly visionary in installing a computer room back in 1982 with around a dozen BBC Micros," he recalls. "I was too late to take the new Computer Studies O-Level with my regular subjects, but I took it along with my A-Level course in sixth form. As sixth formers we had access to the computers at lunchtime, and this was where I was introduced to text-based adventure



» Shaun Abbott, who designed *Emerald Isle* back when he was 18 years old.



» The rear of the poster featured an outline map that was more interesting than useful.



» [MSX] To travel beyond the game's opening locale you'll need to buy yourself a train ticket.

"I HAD A LOT OF DIFFERENT STORIES FLOATING IN MY HEAD"

games, such as *The Hobbit*. I recall it took half the lunch hour to load the game from tape! This kind of problem-solving game piqued my interest, even if I could never seem to solve the puzzles."

Like many fans of the genre, Shaun set about creating his own adventure game. He grabbed pages of plain A4 and a pencil, and he started to scrawl maps based around the idea of a lost civilisation living on a tropical island inside the Bermuda Triangle. Locations were represented as small rectangles all connected together via haphazard lines. The 'blocks' that would halt the player's progress were added and ideas about the puzzles that would open up the way were considered.

"I wanted to try my hand at putting together an adventure game," says Shaun. "I cannot remember how the game's story came about but I was an avid reader as a teen, devouring the sci-fi and fantasy section of our local library, and I had a lot of different stories floating around in my head. The 'development' work was done in my spare time after homework. I didn't consult with anyone else on the project. It was something interesting to do at the time. I did the game as a personal project and then presented it to Level 9 for consideration as I liked some of their other titles."

Shaun admits that many of the details are now sketchy in his mind, but that doesn't mean that his original design is lost to the mists of time. "I recently found the walkthrough and hand-drawn maps, though the pencil is pretty faded. I will take a second look to see if I still have the location descriptions. As everything was done by hand, it may be that I did not make copies before submitting everything to Level 9."

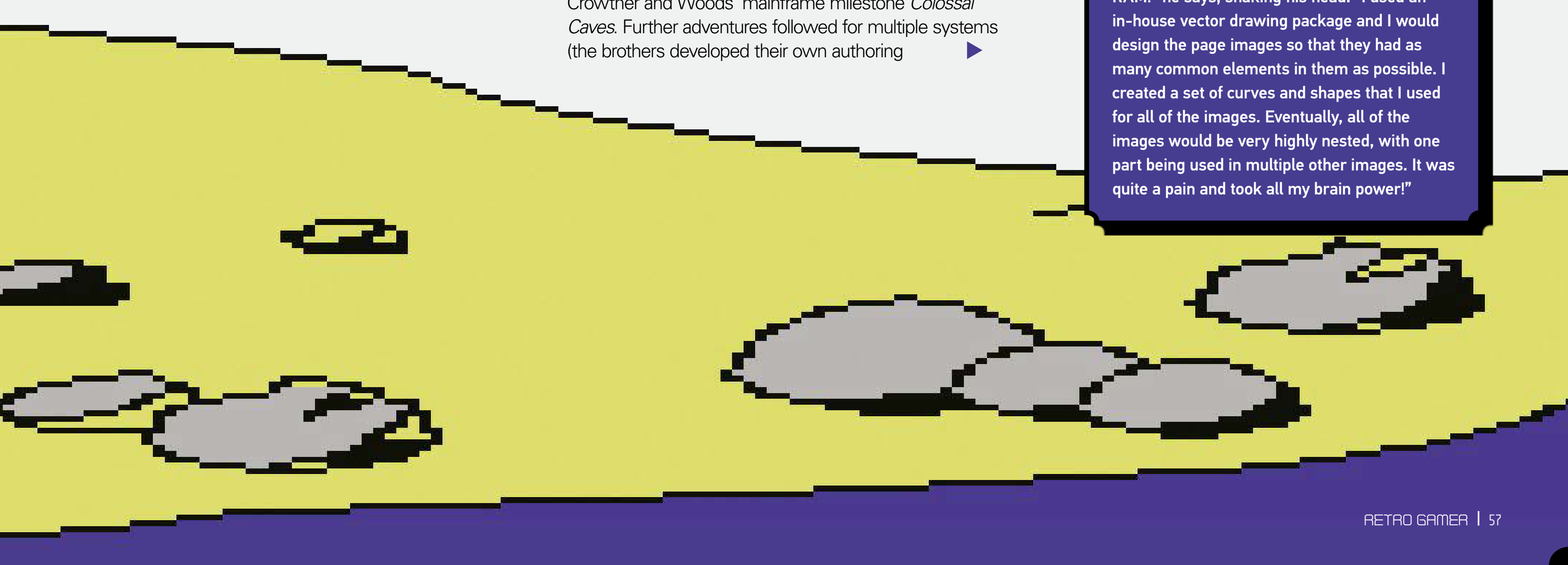
As Shaun goes off to scour his archives we can use the time to talk about Level 9. The Buckinghamshire firm was founded in 1981 by three brothers – Pete, Mike and Nick Austin. The trio started out developing arcade games for the Nascom kit computer before scoring a sizable hit with its home computer version of Crowther and Woods' mainframe milestone *Colossal Caves*. Further adventures followed for multiple systems (the brothers developed their own authoring ▶

THE LOOK OF LEVEL 9

How the illustrations were created

Artist James Horsler created the location graphics for many of Level 9's early adventures, including the 230 images that appeared in *Emerald Isle*. Explaining the process, he says: "I worked on a BBC Micro Model B with its eight colours and 320x256 pixel screen. I'd begin by reading the text descriptions of required scenes and then draw thumbnail sketches on paper. Often there were more than 200 images."

The main constraint was memory. "We had to cram all of the images into just 10K of RAM!" he says, shaking his head. "I used an in-house vector drawing package and I would design the page images so that they had as many common elements in them as possible. I created a set of curves and shapes that I used for all of the images. Eventually, all of the images would be very highly nested, with one part being used in multiple other images. It was quite a pain and took all my brain power!"



FORGOTTEN ISLE

The trouble with trilogies…

On completing *Emerald Isle* the game tells you to look out for *Red Moon* and *The Price Of Magik*, which are "later games in the same series". Level 9 was keen on trilogies, like most fantasy peddlers, and would later remaster and repackage its early '*Middle Earth*' trilogy (*Colossal Adventure*, *Adventure Quest*, *Dungeon Adventure*) as *Jewels Of Darkness*, and follow this up with *Silicon Dreams*, a collection of its three sci-fi games (*Snowball*, *Return To Eden*, *The Worm In Paradise*). For its third trilogy, *Time And Magik*, it chose to ignore *Emerald Isle* and instead join *Lords Of Time* with *Red Moon* and *The Price Of Magik*.

***Lords Of Time* was a better fit for the trilogy, yet the decision meant that the *Emerald Isle* was never updated with improved text and images. Nor was it made available for 16-bit systems, like the other updates. As such, *Emerald Isle* has become one of Level 9's more obscure adventures – one that some gamers may have overlooked.**



» [Atari ST] The three '*Time And Magik*' games were bundled together and released for a wider number of formats.

▶ system – dubbed 'A-code' – which allowed them to create compact, portable code) and Level 9 quickly became the UK's leading adventure house. Although the firm was very much a family affair, Shaun's experience was not without precedent as Level 9's earlier hit, *Lords Of Time,* had been based on a submission by another Level 9 fan, Sue Gazzard. *Red Moon*, the game that followed *Emerald Isle*, was also written by an 'outsider'.

Shaun returns but he's unable to locate any more information. "Looking at the original info on the game that I found," he says, "the top sheet makes reference to a program. This may mean that the descriptions were in a computer file, which would explain why I can't find them." Indeed, the original notes include some BASIC commands, suggesting the descriptions were typed up on a BBC Micro. Shaun recalls that sixth formers were allowed to loan out the Beebs when school was out, so it's clear that he took one home for the holidays.

Emerald Isle was released around Easter 1985 for multiple formats including the BBC Micro, MSX, ZX Spectrum, and Commodore 64. Like other Level 9 titles of this period it came packaged in a large black wallet that contained the tape (or disk, in the case of the BBC and C64 versions), an instruction sheet, a hint request card and an illustrated A3 poster. And so 12 months on from that phone box call, Shaun was finally able to explore *Emerald Isle. His* isle. "Oh, I've never played the game myself!" he says, to our considerable surprise. "I could never afford my own computer at that time. I received a number of free copies from Level 9 but I gave them all away (I did love the poster and I had it on my wall for a number of years). The only thing I did was check the reviews, which, if I remember correctly, were mediocre at best. This was right on the cusp of adding graphics to text-based adventures so the graphics for each scene were something I had not expected to see."

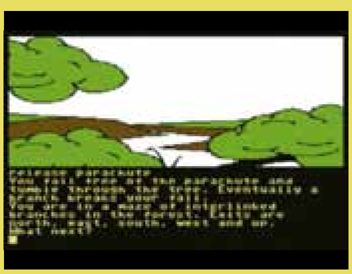


"IT NEVER OCCURRED TO ME TO SEE WHAT CHANGES MIGHT HAVE BEEN MADE"

As it happened *Emerald Isle* was only the second Level 9 title (after *Return To Eden*) to include location graphics for most of its versions. While they were simple depictions, having 200+ different images was an impressive feat considering the lack of available memory. Regarding the reviews, we were happy to share with Shaun some of the positive responses the game received. *Crash* adventure guru Derek Brewster loved it, awarding it 9/10 and a Crash Smash, and writing: "*Emerald Isle* is a game which takes all the best aspects of adventuring and moulds them into a huge,

CONVERSION CAPERS

How the eight versions of Emerald Isle compared



COMMODORE 64

■ This is probably the best version available. The location graphics are nice and clean, filling almost two thirds of the screen (although they do take a little while to be drawn). The yellow system font on the black background makes it very easy to take in the text.

ZX SPECTRUM

■ Of the versions with graphics this is definitely the ugliest. The pictures are drawn in the left third of the screen and then stretched to fill the display, before being crudely coloured in. There are two saving graces: they're drawn quickly, and you can always switch them off.





AMSTRAD CPC

■ Visually, this is very similar to the C64 version, with the location graphics dominating the screen (and they display okay on a green display, too). There's just one problem: the font used is absolutely horrible and is actually difficult to read. What were they thinking?

ATARI 8-BIT

■ Some of the later Level 9 adventures for the Atari 8-bit did feature location graphics, but not this one. As seen on other versions, the pictures were rather rough, so not having them wasn't a huge issue. The text is clear, the parser is quick and, overall, this is a perfectly fine version.





» [ZX Spectrum] Boat building you say? There's a chance that might come in useful later…



» [C64] One of the game's earliest puzzles. You must dress accordingly to enter the palace.

yet detailed story which will have you engrossed for hours." The White Wizard at sister mag *Zzap!64* gave it an overall score of 70%, while Keith Campbell of *C&VG* awarded it 8/10, saying: "All in all another offering from Level 9 of the high standard we've come to expect." Most reviews made reference to the game's attractive RRP of £6.95, which was £3 less than existing Level 9 titles on account of it being "slightly less challenging", according to comments from the Austins.

If Shaun has never played the published game, it begs the question: how much of his original design did the Austins change? We know that Pete Austin had some issues with *Emerald Isle* – he aired them when interviewed by *Page 6 Atari Users Magazine* in 1988, three years after the game was released. Speaking about the pitfalls of adventure game design, he said: "You must stick to the subject and a number of people send in designs where they have clearly run out of ideas halfway through. My best example of this is someone who sent in a Bermuda Triangle game and the first part is all about the Bermuda Triangle – all good stuff, but then he ran out of ideas and so in part two you just went down into the cave below this island in the Bermuda Triangle and it went back into standard hackneyed adventure stuff. You would be surprised how many designs fall into that problem."

Although he doesn't actually say it in the interview, the implication is that the Austins 'fixed' these issues before the game was published. After all, anyone who has completed *Emerald Isle* knows that there's more to the second half of the game than just skulking around in twisty passages. However, Shaun's hand-written walkthrough and map is very close to the final game. Many of the more memorable puzzles are also right there in his original design, such as using the glue pot to distract the hungry spider and returning the lost wallet to the village police station to collect the reward. One noticeable change is that originally the player had to collect all of the various treasures in order to complete the game, whereas in the final version the treasures are an optional quest that simply boosts your score.

"It never occurred to me to see what changes might have been made," says Shaun. "On scanning the documents I've found that there seems to be two versions of the map, a smaller one and a more expanded one. Unfortunately, I cannot remember if the redesign was as a result of discussions with Level 9 or from my own ideas. I don't have extant copies of any communications with Level 9."

This conjecture is a moot point for Shaun anyway. "At that age I was simply pleased to see my idea produced commercially – anything else was a bonus," he says, before revealing that he actually finished work on a follow-up. "I completed and submitted a second text adventure, set in a scientific base on an alien planet with silicon-based chemistry, but that submission was rejected by the Austins. I don't remember any major trauma about that so I guess they were polite at the time! My assumption was that it was too heavy on the science, especially chemistry and physics, to appeal to their consumer base. I still have everything for the rejected game."

Shaun was never involved in another published game, but the prospect of a finished design gathering dust for the 30 years is fascinating. *Emerald Planet,* anyone? *



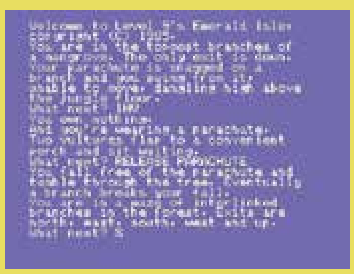
BBC MICRO

■ This is an interesting one. The graphics and text don't appear on the same screen (the screenshot here is a mock-up) – you have to press the TAB key to toggle between them. It works well, but it should be noted that text descriptions are truncated throughout.

MSX

■ Similar to the Spectrum version, as you might expect, only with no attribute issues. Curiously, the image area remains blank for a few seconds and then the finished image slowly wipes down the screen. At least you can type while this effect is happening.





MEMOTECH MTX

■ The MTX was technically similar to the MSX system but the two versions of *Emerald Isle* are quite different. This is text-only, for a start, and the font used is a slightly weedy, but that's just being picky. This is easily on par with the other text-only versions reviewed here.

ENTERPRISE

■ If you were an Enterprise owner then you could at least rely on Level 9 to provide software for your under-supported machine. This was text-only (despite the standard Enterprise having 64K of RAM) but, hey, beggars can't be choosers. A solid version with no real issues.







» [Game Boy Color] HotGen didn't skimp on the gore – ketchup is liberally applied here.

RESIDENT EVIL

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
» **DEVELOPER:** HotGen
» **SYSTEM:** Game Boy Color
» **DUE FOR RELEASE:** 2000

News of Capcom's classic on the Game Boy Color sent fans rabid, only for a cancellation to leave them devastated. Nick Thorpe preps for an autopsy





The world of cancelled games seems like it'd be one filled with obscurities, but even the biggest of series can suffer cancellations – just ask the developers who toiled away on the original *Fallout 3* or *Sonic Xtreme*, only to see them binned. The same fate befell the most ambitious conversion of *Resident Evil*, an attempted Game Boy Color edition of the famed survival horror series.

The impetus for a Game Boy Color version of *Resident Evil* didn't actually come from Capcom, but from a pitch by the developer HotGen. While the studio was brand new, having formed in 1998, founder Fergus McGovern was well-known in the industry as the founder of renowned conversion developer Probe Software. HotGen had developed compression routines that allowed for the Game Boy Color to display a large number of unique background scenes mimicking the prerendered 3D backdrops of *Resident Evil* for the PlayStation, and software scaling that allowed for characters to move around those environments in a convincing fashion. In an interview with IGN, the late Fergus McGovern said, "We showed them the technology, they got excited, we got the job!"

The conversion project was revealed to the public alongside the equally ambitious conversion of *Street Fighter Alpha* in 1999, with both games scheduled for a November release.

Previews noted that while the game was obviously visually simplified as compared to the PlayStation original, players could expect to find all of the features of the original game, as well as new monsters and an option to suspend your game between save points – a welcome addition for a handheld version of such a large game. Unfortunately, when November rolled around, Capcom announced that the game had slipped into 2000, and in December the game failed to appear on Capcom's release schedule for the first half of the next year, though the company claimed that the game was still coming. However, in March 2000 the news broke that Capcom had chosen to pull the plug on the game. In a statement to the press, Capcom said, "The game has been cancelled. We were not confident that the product would have made both consumers and Capcom happy." Rumour had it that the game was already finished, or at least very close, at the time of its completion.



» [Game Boy Color] The brilliant dialogue from the original game is often still present.

> "The GBC version certainly doesn't impart the kind of fear normally associated with Resident Evil"

In 2012, two ROM images of the unfinished game were leaked to the internet. The more complete of the two is a game clearly some way into development – both characters and their stories are included. All of the dialogue is included, but some of it is omitted from actual in-game sequences – for example, the infamous 'Jill sandwich' quote is in the game's data, but Barry doesn't utter it after saving her from the ceiling trap. Locations are complete, albeit with the odd bug that prevents you from moving between them, and puzzles are functioning, too. As a result, you can almost play through the entire game, but that's where the work yet to be done gets in your way.

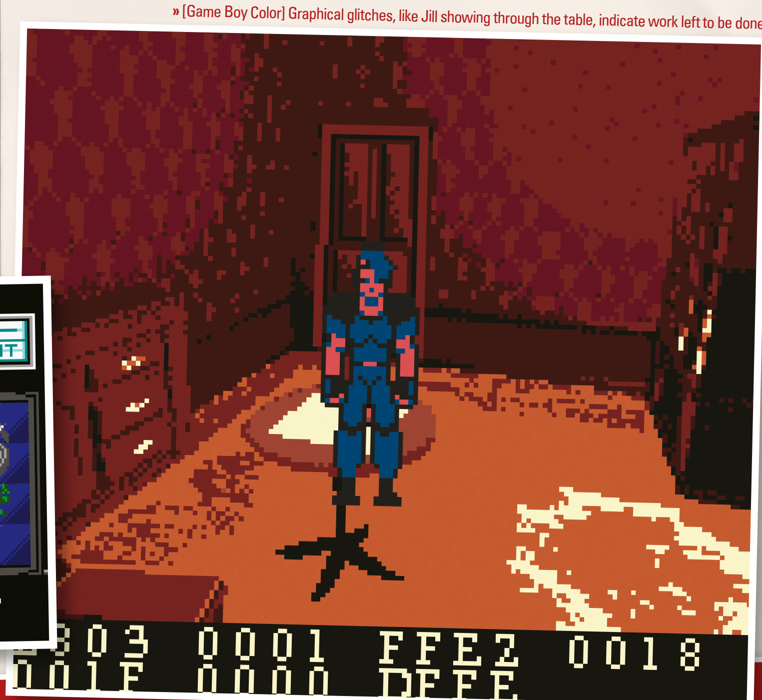
The last boss is not implemented, and the same goes for most of the game's enemies. Zombies are the only enemies fully implemented into the game, and even they're not quite complete – without proper death sprites, they simply fall to their knees when killed. There are also missing weapons, as only the handgun, knife and shotgun are working. Debug information is also permanently turned on in this build, showing the character's position in the world at the bottom of the screen. What's here is very impressive, even if the limitations of the system undeniably show through. The software sprite scaling does slightly distort the characters vertically, the top-down sprites used in some sections looked a bit awkward and the colourful look of the game does detract from the fear factor a bit. However, there's little doubt that a finished version would have delivered on what was promised – this is unmistakably *Resident Evil*, with very few compromises.



This leaves one unanswered question: why did Capcom feel that it wasn't worthy of release? Despite playing well, the Game Boy Color version certainly doesn't impart the kind of fear normally associated with the *Resident Evil* series. If the publisher was intent on protecting that aspect of the series, we could certainly understand the decision to leave it on the shelf, although it does seem somewhat at odds with the existence of silly minigames like The Tofu Survivor. Capcom could also have felt that the market for 'mature' games on the Game Boy Color was too small to justify the release. On the surface, the evidence doesn't support that theory – the company went on to release *Resident Evil Gaiden* for the Game Boy Color in 2001. However, that game used a 2MB ROM, making it cheaper and thus much less risky to produce than the larger 4MB ROM which the cancelled *Resident Evil* would have used.

Ultimately, all of that is simply speculation – whatever the reason, Capcom decided that aborting the project was for the best. The irony is that the cancellation has caused the game to resemble one of its own zombies, a dead project cursed to forever haunt the internet as a shadow of the game it could have been. *

» [Game Boy Color] Graphical glitches, like Jill showing through the table, indicate work left to be done.



OR YOU COULD PLAY...

RESIDENT EVIL 2

1998, TIGER ELECTRONICS

■ The first attempt to convert a *Resi* game to a handheld involved drastic simplification – Claire's story was cut, as was almost anything that didn't involve solving puzzles or shooting zombies. It's a valiant attempt and one of the Game.com's best games, but not good.



ALONE IN THE DARK: THE NEW NIGHTMARE

2001, POCKET STUDIOS

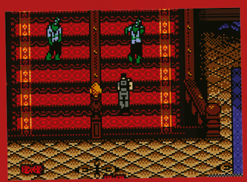
■ Though it uses a more conventional top-down viewpoint during combat, the exploration scenes in this Game Boy Color version of the survival horror are interesting, offering similar fixed perspectives and pseudo-scaling sprites to HotGen's unfinished game.



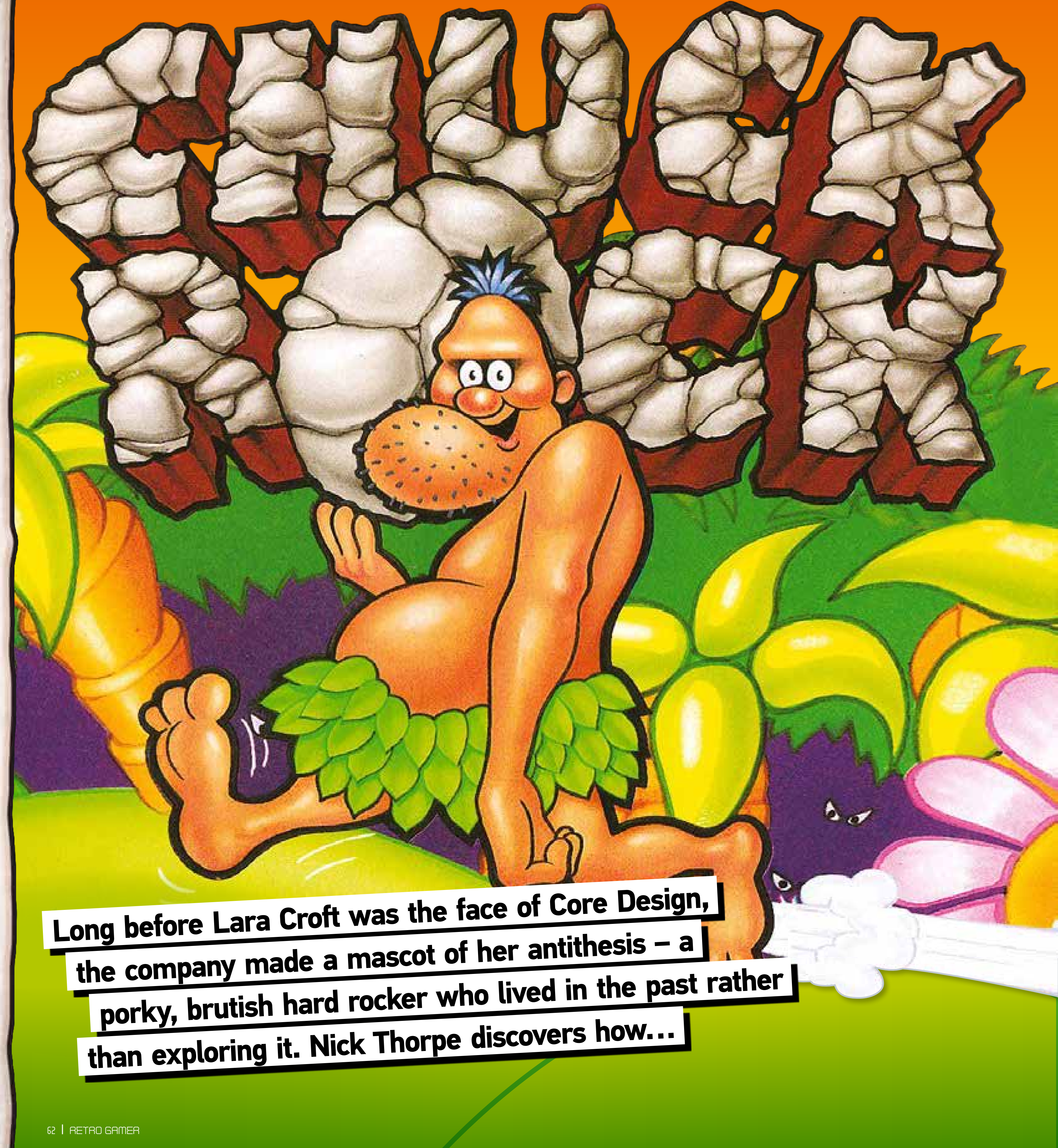
RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN

2001, M4

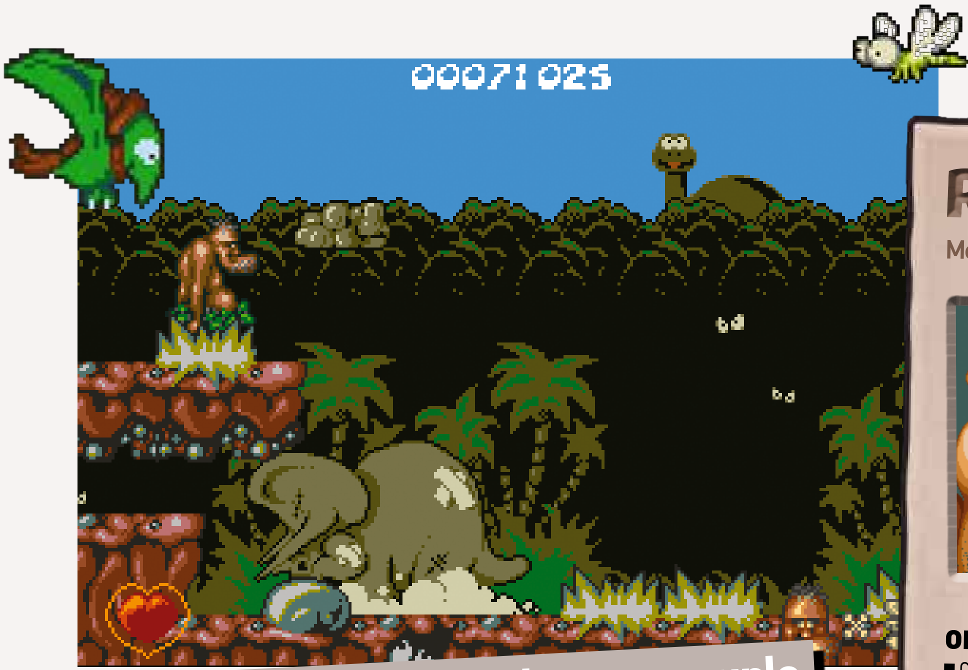
■ When Capcom's horror series finally made its way to the Game Boy Color, it adopted a far more conservative design that was better suited to the 8-bit hardware, with an overhead viewpoint during exploration and first-person combat scenes.



THE HISTORY OF CHUCK ROCK



Long before Lara Croft was the face of Core Design, the company made a mascot of her antithesis – a porky, brutish hard rocker who lived in the past rather than exploring it. Nick Thorpe discovers how…



> **"There may have only been a couple of games set in the prehistoric era so it felt like there was a lot of potential"**
>
> Bob Churchill

Technology moves at a blinding pace, though that's no secret to readers of Retro Gamer. Just tell one of your younger relatives that you can remember a time before YouTube, and they'll ask you what dinosaurs were like. Mention *Street Fighter* to a teenager, and there's a good chance they might just ask you what *Street Fighter* is. It's hard not to feel a bit like a caveman at times. But if you're a younger reader, you shouldn't feel bad about making us feel old (and not just because we are old). Secretly, we enjoy telling you all how things used to be – for example, since we're talking about cavemen, there was one who enjoyed a good deal of popularity back in the early Nineties as a platform game hero and a company mascot. This was when you could star in a platform game without being a cute furry animal and/or Mario, as the genre was bereft of bobcats, bandicoots and even hedgehogs. Core Design was the company that gave us this neanderthal figurehead, and his name was *Chuck Rock*.

"I have this vivid memory of turning around in my chair and seeing this pot-bellied caveman on Lee [Pullen]'s monitor. I loved it immediately and told Lee how great it was," recalls Bob Churchill, game designer on the first two *Chuck Rock* games. "It was such a unique-looking character and there may have only been a couple of games set in the prehistoric era so it felt like there was a lot of potential. I was excited. That's my earliest memory of *Chuck Rock*…" Indeed, Chuck was a distinctive chap. His pronounced jaw, stubbly chin and tendency to bash enemies with his belly was certainly recognisable, and he had the sort of rough-edged charm that contrasted with the clean, family-friendly likes of Mario.



» [Amiga] Later enemies gain their own projectiles, as this snowball-lobbing nuisance shows.

The team in charge of bringing this character to life was a small one, consisting of Bob, graphic artist Lee Pullen and programmer Chris Long. A fourth man would tend to be involved for each release, but this changed by version. "We didn't have a sole in-house audio guy at the time and a few people chipped in for the sound effects," explains Bob. "Ultimately, when all the versions were out, we had several people working on the audio; Matthew Simmonds, Martin Iveson and Matt Furniss to name a ▶



ROCK STARS

Meet the principal players of the Chuck Rock series

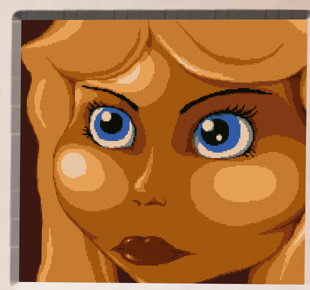


CHUCK

■ He's our unconventional hero, a caveman with little hair and a large belly. He's out to rescue his wife Ophelia in the first game. 18 months after successfully doing so, he's the successful owner of Chuck Motors and a proud dad – so of course, he becomes a kidnap victim, too.

OPHELIA

■ Chuck's wife is the only member of the Rock family not to be playable in a game. In the original, she's out hanging up the washing when she gets clonked on the head and kidnapped. By the time of the second game, she's the mother of Chuck Jr.





CHUCK JR

■ The infant hero of the second game is out to rescue his kidnapped dad. Without the sizeable gut of his old man, Chuck Jr has to rely on the heavy club that he carries with him to fend off angry dinosaurs. He joins his father as a codriver in *BC Racers*.



GARY GRITTER

■ This local bully likes to lurk around in bushes and kidnap women like Ophelia, which leads to the events of the first game. He later returns in *BC Racers*. His name is an unfortunate pun on UK rocker Gary Glitter, who was convicted of serious sex offences after the series ended.



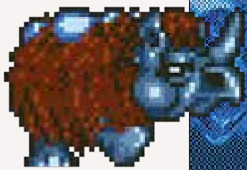


BRICK JAGGER

■ Another villain named after a musician (albeit, this one isn't disgraced). As the owner of a rival car company, Brick Jagger is displeased by the success of Chuck Motors and kidnaps Chuck, which sets him up as the antagonist for the second game. He's also a racer in *BC Racers*.

"I want to design a game whereby you can use the different mechanics in creative ways"

Bob Churchill



▶ few." The musicians turned out to be responsible for another key part of Chuck's character – he was a rocker at heart. When we ask why, Bob responds with, "Doesn't everybody want to be in a band?" It's a fair point, but actually the answer goes a little deeper. "We heard the music and were blown away and had the idea about the characters all playing instruments on the title screen. Chuck *Rock*… Rock Band, I don't know, maybe." "I love the part where Ophelia goes from playing bass to playing the keyboard with one hand."

One of the distinguishing features of *Chuck Rock* was that it was more than a simple platform game where the player runs from left to right and jumps on baddies. As well as his standard attacks, Chuck was able to use rocks that he came across on his travels. "My core challenge, which I carry with me to this day, was/is to create *variety* for the player with the number of mechanics at my disposal," explains Bob. "I want to design a game whereby you can use the different mechanics in creative ways. I remember fondly the first time we got the carrying of the rock, above Chuck's head, to also be an umbrella-type-shield. Mixing elements like this allows the designer to create more variety and gives the player more toys to have fun with." Indeed, the rocks served as multipurpose tools – they could be used in both offensive and defensive ways, as well as serving as platforms and counterweights, depending on the situation.



When *Chuck Rock* first emerged from his cave in the spring of 1991, his game was a critical success. The Amiga press loved it – scores ranged from *Amiga Format*'s very good 80% to *The One*'s 91%, putting it firmly within the upper ranks of platform games on the format. *Amiga Power*'s Stuart Campbell neatly summarised the game as being, "Packed to the brim with original features, well thought out gameplay and nice touches that make it a positive joy to sit down with."

For Bob, it felt like a natural result. "To be honest, I don't recall being surprised," he says of the high reviews. "I probably thought that if we'd had so much fun making the game and were so excited about the prospect of a sequel, then we'd made a pretty decent game and people would love it as much as we did." Before a sequel could arrive, there was a full slate of conversions to tackle, including new territory for the team in the form of consoles – a challenge that Bob relished. "It was really exciting to work on the console versions later; Japan being the land of Nintendo, Sega, Konami and Capcom after all. For a group of three guys, from a 12-person studio in the midlands, it was something special to have *Chuck Rock* on consoles that were the home of *Mario*, *Sonic*, *Contra* and *Ghost 'N Goblins*." The team took the time to improve their conversions, tailoring them to the host formats, and these were also greeted with enthusiasm by the press and public.

Ironically, while work on a *Chuck Rock* sequel began quickly, it ended up delayed due to the success of the original game. "I do remember the day that Jeremy Heath-Smith [Core Design CEO] came up to us and said JVC had approached him and asked if the *Chuck Rock* team would make a mascot game for their WonderMega console." The recognition was exciting, as was the opportunity to target a game at the cutting-edge Mega-CD hardware, but the five-month deadline was considered too difficult to hit. The team rejected the game, even after being offered a £5,000 bonus. In the end, it didn't matter – the team was overruled and five months later, *Wonder Dog* arrived.

After that detour, it was back to *Chuck Rock* – or rather, Chuck Jr, who became the lead in *Chuck Rock II: Son Of Chuck*. What drove this change? "You know what, I'm not 100 per cent sure exactly how that originated," Bob admits. "It was probably us wanting to have that variety; do something different, fresh. We were allowed a lot of freedom and what the hell, changing the main character was a pretty bold move. We had no idea if that would upset people or not, it just felt like the thing to do."



» [Amiga] Chuck needs air, and if he stays underwater too long he'll thrash and kick frantically trying to get it.





» [Mega Drive] Chuck Jr hasn't got the strength to lift rocks, so he just bashes them with his club.









» [Mega Drive] Bonus games see Chuck Jr carving statues, hitting trees and even racing dinosaurs.

» [Mega Drive] This big bird scales in from the background while the foreground dinosaur rotates, it's impressive!



Changing the main character also gave Bob and the team the freedom to change the game design. Rather than interacting with enemies and objects directly, the boisterous baby uses a wooden club. "We went for a club because we wanted to smash more things; break up the environment, knock enemies and rocks around," we're told. "The swing arc of the club allowed us to hit elements in a circular space around the character; enemies flying at you from different angles, the ground below your feet etc. It gave us scope to create styles of combat and puzzles that we didn't have in the original game. I'm fond of the move where Jr balances on the tip of his club to avoid hazards."

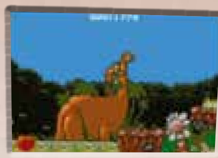
Though the market was becoming saturated with platform games by 1993, the *Chuck Rock* team was able to stay at the front of the pack by adding a new level of technical prowess to the previously acclaimed game design. "This was a blessing in disguise that came from doing *Wonder Dog* in-between *Chuck 1* and *Chuck 2*. Chris had time to learn the ins and outs of the new hardware and he fully utilised it for *Chuck 2*," Bob notes. "We had huge sprites, multilayered parallax scrolling, scaling and rotating sprites, entire moving levels, rotating levels… it gave me a lot of freedom to create new gameplay." It's fair to say that *Chuck Rock II: Son Of Chuck* does a lot of technical things that the renowned *Gunstar Heroes* also does – and there's no copying here, as the two games were out at the same time.

"The experience we gained from working on *Chuck Rock* and then *Wonder Dog* together, along with ▶

CAVEMAN CAPERS

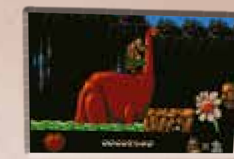
The original Chuck Rock made its way to many different platforms

AMIGA



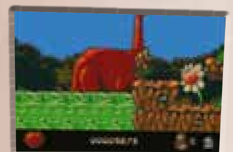
■ The original version features one independently-scrolling background layer, nice sampled speech and an excellent title theme. You can opt to keep this title theme playing as you rock the prehistoric world, but if you do you'll lose out on sound effects.

ATARI ST



■ This retains the design and dependable controls of the Amiga version, but utilises a smaller viewing area to show the action and lacks sampled sound effects. The background visuals, which are different to those used in the other computer versions, scroll on the same layer as the foreground.

ARCHIMEDES



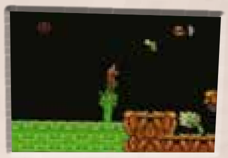
■ This is basically just as good as the Amiga version, with the graphics adjusted to fit the colour palette of the Acorn machine. Your status bar has been shifted below the active play area, too. The only negative to mention is that unlike the Amiga version, there's no option to keep the music playing.

COMMODORE 64



■ This rare release only made it to shelves in Italy, which is a shame. It's not to the standard of the 16-bit versions, but it's as good a conversion as you can expect from the 8-bit machine, with colourful backgrounds, faithful level designs and a good SID rendition of the title theme.

MASTER SYSTEM



■ Sega's 8-bit console hosts an enjoyable version of *Chuck Rock*, but it's not without compromises. Chuck's adventure takes place against a black backdrop, and many of the more impressive effects have been cut down or removed. Sound is also simplified, with no music and no sampled speech.

MEGA DRIVE



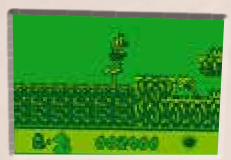
■ Here's a nice conversion – it keeps all of the stuff that was good in the Amiga version, but features both in-game music and sound effects. The backdrops have been improved with more detail, but like the Amiga version, it's a static plane. The only big omission is the intro animation.

SNES



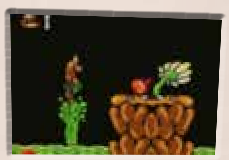
■ This is one of the best versions of *Chuck Rock* – the superior colour handling of the SNES is put to great use here, and the new backgrounds feature excellent parallax effects. It features both music and sound effects in game, with another brand-new soundtrack.

GAME BOY



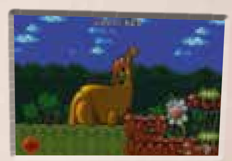
■ The graphics have been redrawn for this version of *Chuck Rock*, allowing for authentic recreations of the original levels. Both music and sound effects are included, though the music here isn't anything super special due to the limited sound hardware. If you want Chuck on the go, this will do the job.

GAME GEAR



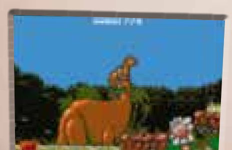
■ Although it uses the same graphics and sound effects as the Master System version, *Chuck Rock* on the Game Gear has been redesigned to account for the smaller screen. While this shows consideration for the format, something is lost in the process – levels feel too heavily simplified.

MEGA-CD



■ This offers slight but welcome improvements that put it over the good Mega Drive version. The intro is back, and this time it's got voice acting! Elsewhere, the backgrounds gain some nice parallax effects, the sampled sound effects are better and more numerous, and a CD version of the Mega Drive soundtrack is included.

AMIGA CD32



■ Core clearly had little faith in the power of Commodore's 32-bit CD-ROM console, as no effort was made here. This release was exactly the same as the Amiga version that appeared three years earlier, with the only consolation for CD32 owners being the game's £14.99 budget price.





THE ANATOMY OF CHUCK

While similar in physiology to the modern-day human, Chuck is a slightly different breed. Here's a thorough scientific analysis…











» [32X] Racers bunch up fairly closely, so if you fall behind it's very easy to end up right at the back.

▶ the fantastic bond that had developed between us in that time, helped us to deliver grander designs," Bob recalls. "One of my favourite levels is the tree sinking into the lava, tilting left and right as it sank. My hat goes off to Chris for the coding in that game." While that particular stage only appeared in the Mega Drive and Mega-CD versions, every version shared one of the other major improvements. "The power of the consoles and Chris' coding prowess allowed us to really push the design of the bosses," explains the designer. "We wanted to go bigger and have more bosses than the first game. Sequels are more challenging to create in that respect; as developers, you want to do more and as a player you expect more, and often, *time* is the thing you don't get more of." The improvement here was easy to see – boss battles were now encounters with huge dinosaurs that used multiple sprites to show smoother movement, which were much more imaginative than those of the first game.

The only downside was that fewer players would get to experience *Chuck Rock II*, as the game only came out for Amiga and Sega platforms. Despite being previewed in *Atari ST Review*, no ST version was released – when asked why it didn't appear, Bob replied, "It was probably because it was a better bet to spend the resources on the Sega versions." It's probable that the game was never in production for that format in the first place – the preview in question is illustrated with sprites from *Wonder Dog* and *Chuck Rock*, and Core was in the process of dropping ST support.



» [32X] The use of sprites for scenery is a nice touch, but one which comes at the cost of frame-rate.





» [32X] This guitar is poised and ready to prevent rivals from passing with a well-timed whack.



"The caveman styling of the characters had a certain charm I think"

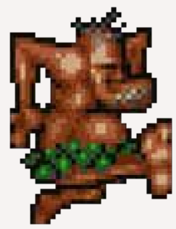
Stuart Atkinson

Chuck Rock II: Son Of Chuck garnered good reviews from the Amiga press in the spring of 1993, with scores ranging from 78% in *Amiga Force* to 90% in *Amiga Action*. The Sega versions arrived in the autumn and also fared well, with scores in the mid-80% range. Despite the game doing well with the press again, there would be no third platform game in the series. Instead, Chuck's automotive pursuits were further explored in a racing spin-off.

"From what I remember, it'd been decided that a *Chuck* spin-off game should be made but not what kind of game it should be," recalls Stuart Atkinson. "At the same time, half the office was obsessed with playing *Mario Kart* and a 'Mode 7' 3D system had already been developed for *Thunder Hawk*. So the decision was made to develop a *Mario Kart*-style racer with the *Chuck Rock* cast using the *Thunder Hawk* engine." This game would start life as *Chuck Rally*, but ended up as *BC Racers* upon its final release.

Although clearly inspired by Nintendo's racer, *BC Racers* is by no means a clone – for a start, the turbo boosts earned once per lap are inspired by *F-Zero*. "Adding the combat element to the game was what I thought really made a difference, especially during a two-player game," says Stuart. "Smashing your friend in the face while overtaking him was very satisfying!" Indeed, *BC Racers* owes far more to *Road Rash* than *Mario Kart* in this regard – racers club and bash one another at close quarters, rather than using item pick-ups, and cars can be wrecked if they sustain too much damage. Thankfully, picking up meat will refill your health bar in quick fashion.

The responsibility for the overall look of *BC Racers* at Core was handled by a relatively new artist, Toby Gard. "All of the animation, art and level design was created by him," Stuart explains, and it was his work that Stuart was primarily concerned with. "I converted Toby's original Mega-CD artwork over to the PC, and worked closely with the PC programmer (Martin Gibbins) to get it to play well." *BC Racers* was quite ambitious visually, as it made extensive use of scaling sprites to depict trackside scenery, including trees, houses and even spectators. This was something that the SNES Mode 7 games didn't do, but it did come at a performance cost as the frame-rate in console versions of *BC Racers* was lower. "Toby was a close friend of mine at the time so I found him easy to work with but others might of found him a bit stubborn at times," Stuart recalls of the man that would later gain fame for his role in creating *Tomb Raider*. "It was quite difficult to persuade him that he might not always be right. But it was this belief in himself that ultimately led to him getting *Tomb Raider* off the ground."





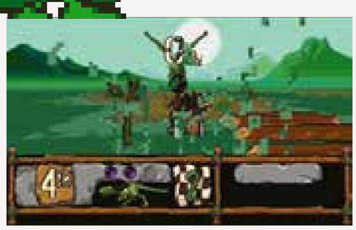
BC Racers was released for Mega-CD in 1994 and PC, 3DO and 32X in 1995. The Mega-CD original was reasonably well received by the press, though reviewers complained about the lack of a competitive multiplayer mode. This was crucial to the appeal of *Super Mario Kart*, and the later versions of *BC Racers* did include it. Today, the PC version is best to play as it can achieve a frame-rate higher than any of the other versions.

To date, *BC Racers* is the final game in the *Chuck Rock* series, but that's not to say that another platform game is completely off the cards. "I have thought about that in the last few years. In fact, maybe I should talk about it to see if people would be into it," Bob confides. "An idea we had thrown around for *Chuck Rock 3* would have starred Ophelia as the main protagonist. Following on from changing the main character from *Chuck 1* to *Chuck 2*, it was only natural to do it for *Chuck 3* and include the entire family in the trilogy. Ophelia had been kidnapped in *Chuck 1*, had her husband kidnapped and her son ran off in *Chuck 2*. It was time Ophelia had a piece of the action." Presumably the lady of the Rock family would also have had her own unique style of play, too? "She was to carry a whip as her weapon which would allow extended combat range, swinging platform action and we had lots of ideas for puzzle mechanics," Bob confirms. "It would be amazing to get back together with Chris and Lee, relive some of that 16-bit magic, and create a modern action platformer."

Even without Ophelia's adventure, the *Chuck Rock* series still elicits fond memories over 20 years after it ended. Why is that? For Stuart, it comes down to players getting out as much as the developers put in. "A lot of love went into their creation and I think it could be felt when playing them, the company was becoming very good at developing platform games," he offers. "The caveman styling of the characters had a certain charm I think, it was light hearted, not trying to be too serious like some games try to be." As for Bob, the news that *Chuck Rock* still has a following is a welcome surprise. "I didn't know they remained popular. That is so amazing to hear," he exclaims. "I'm overjoyed that people share that passion for a game that we put so much passion into. A huge thanks to all the fans. Unga Bunga!" *



» [32X] This cave track is a tricky one, thanks to its sharp turns and false shortcuts.



» [32X] Pterodactyl rescue is needed for racers that venture into the deep waters, costing valuable time.

Minority Report

INTERESTING GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED



SATELLAVIEW

Exclusive to Japan and reliant on satellite broadcasts which ended at the turn of the millennium, the Satellaview is one of the most obscure pieces of Nintendo hardware. We run down some of its most notable titles

BS LEGEND OF ZELDA

■ DEVELOPER: **NINTENDO** ■ YEAR: **1995**

■ Notable for being the world's first integrated 'radio game', *BS Legend of Zelda* (BS standing for 'Broadcast Satellite') was also the Satellaview's debut 'SoundLink' title, and boasted a streaming vocal track which featured voice actors who would expand on the story during gameplay.

While *BS Legend of Zelda* is set in Hyrule and shares a very similar plot to that of the original *Legend Of Zelda* – Link does not feature as the hero; instead, the main protagonist is the avatar selected in the Satellaview's user interface, which takes the form of a game known as *BS-X: The Story Of The Town Whose Name Was Stolen*. Because Nintendo and distributor St.GIGA were still experimenting with the limitations of broadcast satellite gaming, the streaming vocal track was restricted to certain moments in-game. During these moments, the gameplay would pause while the vocal track played before handing control back to the player. Each spoken moment would reveal a new power or inform the player of events happening elsewhere in the game world.



BS Legend Of Zelda was divided into four time-limited episodes; at the conclusion of each episode the player was returned to *BS-X: The Story Of The Town Whose Name Was Stolen* and would not be able to return to Hyrule until the following broadcast date, when the new episode would grant new abilities and unlock additional parts of the overworld map. Despite the linear nature of the experience and the fact that the game had to halt entirely to play vocal audio, *BS Legend Of Zelda* caused such a stir upon its August 1995 broadcast that St.GIGA was overwhelmed with letters from fans. Following the rapturous reception of the original run it was decided that *BS Legend Of Zelda* would be broadcast a second time in September; this wasn't enough to quench the thirst of fans and three more runs were scheduled.

In December, a remixed version of the game was broadcast, and ran until January 1996, with a second run taking place in March. Because the broadcast audio was stored in RAM, emulating *BS Legend Of Zelda* today is almost impossible; stripped of its time-sensitive audio queues and rigid broadcast schedule, it's tricky to experience the game exactly as Japanese players did back in the mid-Nineties, and as a result the game feels little more than a remake of the 1985 original. However, efforts to preserve the experience have taken place and it's now possible to play the title without the enforced pauses, as well as hear the dialogue in English, French, Spanish, and German. Fans have also replaced the main protagonist with Link, returning the fabled Hero Of Time to what many regard to be his rightful place at the helm of one of the franchise's most obscure entries.

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

SECRET OF MANA

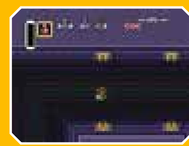
SNES, 1993



■ Next to the mighty *Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past* this is arguably the best action RPG on the SNES. Boasting sumptuous visuals, gorgeous music and even a co-op mode where a friend can control an ally character, this is an absolute must-play for any self-respecting adventure game fan.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

SNES, 1991



■ This top-down action RPG set the bar high for the genre, and many fans will argue that it hasn't been bettered in all these years. *A Link To The Past* has it all: timeless visuals, a sprawling overworld, loads of secrets to uncover and a twist which literally doubles the size of the game. Essential.

ALUNDRA

PLAYSTATION, 1997



■ The 32-bit era saw the humble 2D action RPG fall out of favour slightly, but this sterling effort was a notable exception. Using the increased colour palette of the PlayStation it showcases incredibly rich visuals and the storage afforded by CD-ROM allows for an epic soundtrack and massive game world.

IN DEPTH



TAKE YOUR TIME

■ Time-based events would take place during the initial broadcast, with new areas and abilities opening up at set points.

HEART ATTACK

■ You begin the game with three hearts; these can be restored by collecting hearts from downed enemies or running into a fairy.

A LEGEND REINVENTED

■ Taking the original NES game as its template, *BS Legend Of Zelda* improves the visuals and audio quality considerably.

VERY HANDY

■ Just like the original game, it's possible to hold two items at once, some of which are weapons while others push the quest onwards.

Minority Report

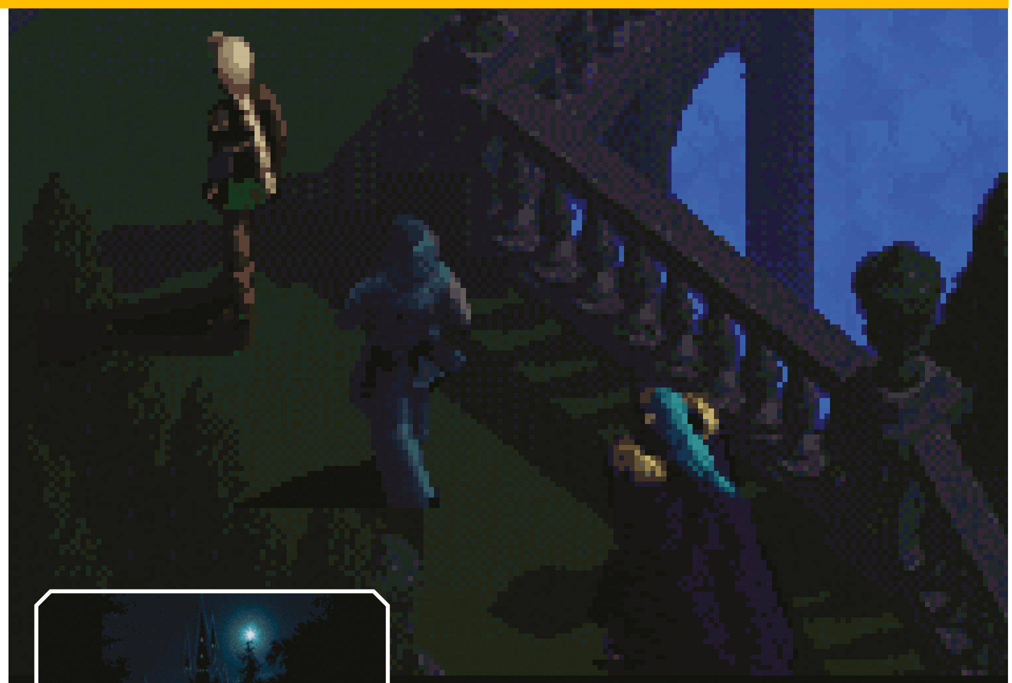
RADICAL DREAMERS

■ DEVELOPER: **SQUARE** ■ YEAR: **1996**

■ Perhaps one of the most famous Satellaview titles, *Radical Dreamers* serves as a side-story to the seminal SNES JRPG *Chrono Trigger*, originally released in 1995.

Unlike its forerunner, *Radical Dreamers* is mainly text-based, with minimal visual and audio content. Focused on a trio of treasure-hunting protagonists called Serge, Kid, and Magil, the gameplay largely consists of selecting from a group of available actions to navigate the world, participate in combat and converse with other characters. As the main narrative plays out, connections between *Radical Dreamers* and *Chrono Trigger* are revealed with startling regularity, and upon completing the main game, the first of several additional scenarios is unlocked. Many of these boast deliberately comical appropriations of the main plot.

Director Masato Kato later stated that he was aware that *Radical Dreamers* wouldn't be a massive commercial success due to the limited install base of the Satellaview, so he endeavoured to craft an experience which was for his own personal amusement more than anything else. Created in just three months, Kato considered the game to be "unfinished" and while he feels it helped him "find his own path" as a director, he refused to allow Radical Dreamers to be included as an Easter Egg in the Japanese PlayStation port of *Chrono Trigger*.





» [SNES] The sparse graphics are more than made up for by the excellent soundtrack, which has some good sound effects and tunes

> **"Created in just three months, Kato considered the game to be "unfinished""**

MORE GAMES TO PLAY



» BS FIRE EMBLEM: ARCHANEA SENKI-HEN

■ DEVELOPER: **INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS**
■ YEAR: **1997**

■ Released in 1997 as a prequel to the original *Fire Emblem* and *Fire Emblem: Mystery Of The Emblem*, *Archanea Senki-hen* was broadcast in four episodes and is significant for being the first game in the franchise to showcase voice acting. The tactical gameplay is intact, but this time the player has to survive waves of enemies over a three-hour time limit. The original broadcast vocal track can no longer be experienced, sadly.



» BS MAKIBA MONOGATARI

■ DEVELOPER: **AMCCUS**
■ YEAR: **1996**

■ Better known by its western title *Harvest Moon*, this port of the SNES version took an episodic arrangement with new chapters being broadcast over a period of weeks. Like other SoundLink titles, *BS Makiba Monogatari* employed full voice acting during each segment. Following the run in September 1996 the episodes were rerun in November. *BS Makiba Monogatari* has sadly never received a release outside of the Satellaview.



» BS DRAGON QUEST 1

■ DEVELOPER: **ENIX**
■ YEAR: **1996**

■ A remake of the 1986 original which kickstarted the phenomenally successful *Dragon Quest* series, *BS Dragon Quest 1* pushed the boat out with voice acting over the game's four different broadcast events, and a medal-collection system gave the title a competitive edge, encouraging players to outclass their friends. The alterations, made to fit the broadcast format, might have made things a little awkward, but this was a huge release for the platform.



» BS THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: ANCIENT STONE TABLETS

■ DEVELOPER: **NINTENDO**
■ YEAR: **1997**

■ Similar to *A Link To The Past*, *BS The Legend of Zelda: Ancient Stone Tablets* was the third original *Zelda* game to be released for the Satellaview, and employed the same SoundLink system where voice acting was beamed directly to the console during scheduled broadcast sessions. The use of streamed audio was more refined, with the player free to move during such segments.

BS F-ZERO GRAND PRIX

■ PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO** ■ YEAR: **1996/1997**

■ Given how popular the original *F-Zero* was on the SNES, it's amazing that we never got a proper sequel during the console's incredibly successful lifespan – doubly so when you consider that it was a launch title, and Nintendo therefore had plenty of time to work on a worthy successor for its 16-bit powerhouse.

The closest thing Japanese fans received was *F-Zero Grand Prix*, which was divided into two releases on the Satellaview, launching in 1996 and 1997 respectively. The first entry showcased a new circuit in each of its four broadcast sessions as well as the 15 original tracks from the 1990 SNES game, and it allowed players to hop into one of four entirely different playable vehicles: Blue Thunder, Luna Bomber, Green Amazone and Fire Scorpion, each with their own inherent strengths and weaknesses. The second title – dubbed *BS F-Zero Grand Prix 2* and released in August 1997 – pulled together all of the new tracks into a new league and introduced new Grand Prix and Practice modes for additional value. *BS F-Zero Grand Prix* was notable for being a SoundLink release, and the game was accompanied by live commentary during each race which added to the experience, but – predictably – didn't tie in directly with the actual performance of the player.

It was reported at the time that a western release was under consideration, but there seems to be some confusion about what form this sequel would have taken; some believe that the cartridge follow-up became the Satellaview releases, while others think that it almost happened the other way around.





» [SNES] You can select from four all-new craft in this semi-sequel, each of which possesses different advantages and disadvantages



RETRO STINKER

» BS SPRIGGAN POWERED

■ DEVELOPER: **NAXAT SOFT** ■ YEAR: **1996**

■ Often referred to as part of the *Spriggan* series, with Naxat Soft handling development. A cartridge version also exists; neither are worth the effort. The action is dull and the CGI visuals lack detail.



» KAIZOU CHOUJIN SCHBIBINMAN ZERO

■ DEVELOPER: **MASAYA**
■ YEAR: **1997**

■ Part of the *Schbibinman* series which began life on the NEC's PC Engine console and is better known as '*Shockman*' in the west, *Kaizou Choujin Schbibinman Zero* is an action platformer which, as luck would have it, was recently given a physical, cartridge release by Columbus Circle in very limited quantities. Predictably, the game sold out almost instantly and, today, copies are now changing hands for high prices online.



» ITOI SHIGESATO NO BASS TSURI NO 1

■ DEVELOPER: **HAL LABORATORY**
■ YEAR: **1997**

■ A rather playful fishing simulation from the creator of the *Mother* series, *Itoi Shigesato No Bass Tsuri No 1* was released on the Super Famicom as well as gracing the Satellaview, where it played host to a series of competitions in which Itoi himself took part. The best players were awarded a collectible *Bass Tsuri No 1*-exclusive prize lure. A sequel appeared on the N64 in 2000, but the series sadly remains exclusive to Japan.



» EXCITEBIKE BUN BUN MARIO BATTLE STADIUM

■ DEVELOPER: **NINTENDO**
■ YEAR: **1997**

■ Ostensively a lovingly touched-up version of the NES title *Excitebike*, *Excitebike Bun Bun Mario Battle Stadium* replaced the nondescript riders with famous faces from the Mushroom Kingdom, including Mario, Luigi, Princess Peach, Wario and Toad. A new 'Super' mode gave the player unlimited turbo and introduced coins, which, like in *Super Mario Kart*, boosted your maximum speed.



» SUTTE HAKKUN '98 EVENT VERSION

■ DEVELOPER: **INDIESZERO**
■ YEAR: **1997**

■ This action-based puzzle platformer was released several times on the Satellaview before receiving a physical cartridge release on the Super Famicom in 1998. In addition to being jolly good fun, it is notable for being the debut release of Indieszero, a studio which would later produce notable Nintendo titles such as *NES Remix*, *Theatrhythm Final Fantasy*, *GameCenter CX: Arino no Chousenjou* and *Electroplankton*.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Castlevania: Bloodlines

» **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE » **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI » **RELEASED:** 1994

The *Castlevania* series has always featured some highly satisfying boss fights and *Bloodlines* is no different. Having said that, this particular battle, atop an ancient tower, is a lot trickier to get to grips with than most, due to having to battle the elements as well as your demonic foe. As you reach the tower's zenith your winged adversary flies pass you, whipping at you with its tail. The tower spins and the clouds race past, creating an incredibly dramatic scene. That bothersome tail continues to be a pain though and you also have to deal with shots that can knock you off your precarious perch if you time your jumps wrong. It's a genuinely thrilling moment that still gets the pulse racing today. *





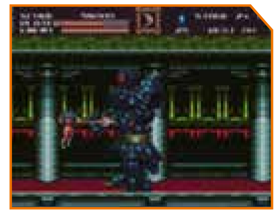
MORE CLASSIC CASTLEVANIA: BLOODLINES MOMENTS

Reflection Of You



Even though it pales in comparison to *Super Castlevania*, *Bloodlines* still has plenty of lovely graphical effects. One of the most pleasing takes place on the second stage when you battle above a still lake. Your actions are reflected in the dark pools below, creating a simple, but impressive-looking image.

Bits And Pieces



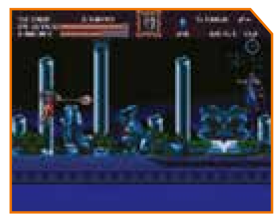
When you first encounter the rock golem that guards the gateway to level three it looks terrifying. The creature is gigantic; towering so high over you, he actually disappears off the top of the screen. Worry not, though, for continually hitting his stone body, breaks it away, allowing you to reach his vulnerable eye.

The Leaning Tower



Level three takes the action to Italy where you climb up inside the Leaning Tower Of Pisa. What's interesting here is that it's worryingly unstable, causing you to jump for dear life as the huge monument lurches back and forth. It does create a lovely graphical effect, mind, so it's worth the aggravation.

A Watery Death



The second level is full of watery threats, with a misplaced jump causing you to prematurely drown if you're not careful. Even when you get to dry land you're not out of danger, because this deadly wizard summons water that slowly fills the screen. If you don't finish him off in time you'll lose another precious life.

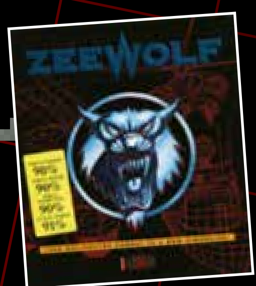
BIO

The first Sega *Castlevania* exclusive had a big task on its hands as it arrived after the sublime SNES hit *Super Castlevania IV*. While its graphics looked a little weak in places, Konami pulled off all sorts of impressive graphical tricks to ensure that the Sega game was no slouch. It might have had far fewer levels than its SNES equivalent, but it did feature two very different characters: the whip-wielding John Morris and Eric Lecarde, whose use of a spear allows him to occasionally take alternate routes through certain levels.

THE MAKING OF

ZEEW

One of the last great Amiga games, Zeewolf was a labour of love from a team of gaming fans who cut their teeth as magazine critics. Mike Bevan talks to programmer, and former Amstrad Action writer, Andrew Wilton



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** BINARY ASYLUM/EMPIRE INTERACTIVE
- » **DEVELOPER:** BINARY ASYLUM
- » **RELEASED:** 1994
- » **PLATFORM:** AMIGA
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

As 3D Amiga action games go, *Zeewolf* takes a lot of beating. A superbly polished mission-based shoot-'em-up, starring a wondrously manoeuvrable helicopter, it's a game that harks back to physics-based classics, like *Gravitar* and *Thrust*, with a healthy dollop of *Choplifter* and *Desert Strike* thrown in. The game was the first title developed by Binary Asylum, a studio set up by a trio of ex-gaming journalists; Andy Wilton and Andy Smith, who had previously worked on titles like *Amstrad Action* and *ACE* magazine, and Bob Wade, one of the original staff writers at *Zzap!64*. "Binary Asylum was set up originally to publish *Zeewolf*", recalls Andrew. "The game had already been in development for a while before we set up the company. Our aim was basically to make great games under decent working conditions."

In their time as games reviewers, the three had useful exposure to plenty of different game titles, and one in particular, from the mind of *Elite* cocreator David Braben, was to become a big influence on *Zeewolf*. "We played a lot of games," Andrew continues, "pretty much everything there was to play across any platform, which gave us a lot of material to draw on for inspiration, some of it quite obscure. An obvious example would be the original *Zarch*, which only ran on the Acorn Archimedes – a very unlikely machine for a gamer to have knocking around! *Zarch* [a game later released on the Amiga and Atari ST as *Virus*], was the first time I ever saw someone try to make a really rich, detailed world with 3D graphics. It was right at the edge of what was possible with the hardware at the time, and I loved it. My feeling was that it could be taken further, though. I thought an inhabited world with land vehicles and buildings would be even more compelling."

Andrew's route from reviewing 8-bit Amstrad games software to programming an Amiga classic was a completely self-taught one. "I quit journalism to start a one-man software house selling applications and utilities for the Amstrad PCW (an 8-bit computer marketed as a word processor, though it did have a few games, notably Jon Ritman's awesome *Batman*)" he chuckles. "I wrote a spreadsheet program, and programming the 3D graphing module of this revived an old interest in computer graphics, so I thought I'd try my hand at writing a game. I bought an Amiga and the hardware manual, and an old school friend of mine, Jim Gardner, then working at MicroProse, gave me the source for a basic Amiga game startup sequence, just enough to gain control of the



» [Amiga] The Gerry Anderson- inspired Camel supply vehicle refuels us on an allied carrier.

hardware. I soon had it drawing wireframe models, then filled polygons, and I was off. I didn't have a clear business goal; I just wanted to make a game. I admired the look of *Virus* enormously and started off in that direction, a polygon spacecraft in bright colours. It just kind of evolved from there."

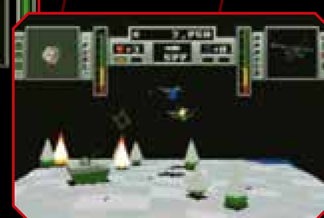
While *Virus/Zarch* is an obvious influence on *Zeewolf*, both graphically and in the mouse control system, there were several other inspirations on the game that Andy reveals to us. "Landing to pick people up was from *Choplifter*," he says. "It was wonderfully tense being on the deck and vulnerable while you waited for the little guys to get on board, and I definitely wanted that. Carrying the tank on a sling was kind of a *Thrust* reference. I should probably mention FTL's *Oids* as well, kind of a hybrid of *Choplifter* and *Thrust*, which I played a lot of."

"Outside games, the two big influences were the Robert Mason book *Chickenhawk* and the work of Gerry Anderson, particularly *Thunderbirds*. *Chickenhawk* is the memoirs of a guy who flew Hueys in Vietnam, but the book's really about flying rather than warfare, and goes into fantastic detail on how helicopters work. I'd never have made a game about helicopters if I hadn't read that book. Gerry Anderson was a big influence on the feel of the game generally, the theatre of how the crashed planes leaked fuel and caught fire, that kind of thing. Specifically, he was where the Camel supply vehicles [located at friendly Carriers and bases] in the game came from. I couldn't figure out how to refuel the helicopter, so I asked myself, 'What would Gerry Anderson do?' And the answer was obvious – he'd have a special purpose vehicle drive up with a cherry picker arm on it, and the arm would extend very slowly with an electric motor sound effect, and it'd clamp onto the rotor hub and the fuel would start flowing. So that's what I did."

Andy started work on the game in 1992, two years before it would actually make it onto Amiga software retailer's shelves. "It took me about six months to get the foundations laid, the 3D maths and polygon fill and so on," he



» [Amiga] Escorting a friendly Kestrel to safety involves making bad tanks go boom.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ZEEWOLF
SYSTEM: AMIGA
YEAR: 1994

ZEEWOLF 2: WILD JUSTICE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: AMIGA
YEAR: 1995

STAR TREK: NEW WORLDS
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 2000

PUSHING THE LIMITS

Five more 3D Amiga games that really pushed the hardware

EPIC

1992



■ After finding fame with flight sim *F29-Retaliator*, Runcorn-based Digital Image Design improved its 3D engine to produce this slick space shooter. Channelling *Battlestar Galactica* and *Starglider*, playing it is a very captivating experience, particularly in its planet-based battles. DID went on to bring us *Robocop 3* and the stunning *TFX*.

LEGENDS OF VALOUR

1992



■ This RPG from designer Kevin Bulmer was arguably the *Skyrim* of its day, featuring an extensive texture-mapped medieval town complete with shops, taverns, dungeons, NPCs, a day-and-night cycle and open-ended gameplay where you forged a career of your making through job tasks and missions.

FRONTIER: ELITE II

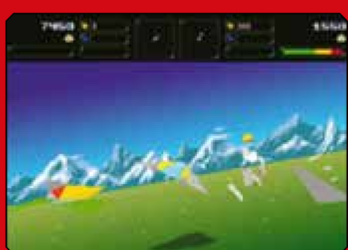
1993



■ It's hard not to admire *Frontier*, a game with an entire galaxy of procedurally generated star systems and a mind-boggling 100 billion planets, on a single floppy, two decades before *No Man's Sky*. Unfortunately it was probably too graphically ambitious for lower end Amigas, slowing down to a crawl around spaceports.

GUARDIAN

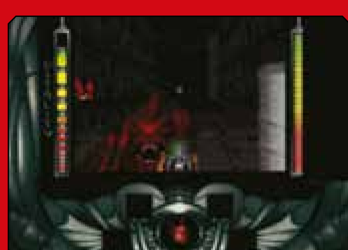
1994



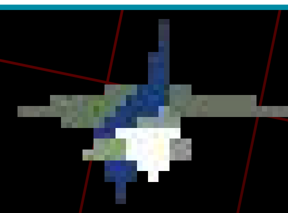
■ When early pictures of New Zealand-based Acid Software's *Guardian* first appeared in the press there were rumblings it might be the system's answer to *Star Fox* on the SNES. The finished game, released on A1200 and CD32, turned out to be more like a reimagining of *Defender*, with blisteringly fast-polygon graphics.

ALIEN BREED 3D

1995



■ Team17 attempted to produce a full-on *Doom* clone for the Amiga with this spin-off from its famous sci-fi shooter franchise, and the unlikely gamble paid off with a technically impressive, atmospheric and surprisingly nippy blaster. It even boasted graphical effects not seen in the PC game, namely fully translucent water effects.



says. "From there on it was all much more about the gameplay." Andy also reveals that, originally, the player's vehicle was a much more traditional spaceship/jet design rather than a helicopter. "Early prototypes – the ones with VTOL spaceships in – were called 'Beewolf', after a kind of wasp that attacks beehives. I liked the comparison with you flying into enemy territory and stirring up swarms of defenders. When I changed the player craft to a helicopter, I started calling it 'Zeewolf' as a play on that and 'Zee' as in LZ, Landing Zone in the Vietnam War-era slang. I assumed we'd find a better name later on, but we ended up keeping it."

The success of mission-based titles like EA's *Desert Strike* was one of the factors in switching from a space setting to a contemporary battleground scenario. "Games with semi-realistic war settings were very successful, and this helped persuade us to move the game in that direction," Andy remembers. "I was reluctant to switch to helicopters as I knew that would mean more polys to draw and thus a lower frame-rate, but it was clear where the money was, and helicopter gunships are awesome."

Andy admits that creating the polygon models seen in the game was a somewhat primitive process on the Amiga. "I sketched the models, then drew them on graph paper and typed the raw numbers in by hand for the vertex coordinates, face lists etc," he explains. "The models for the game were unusual by modern standards in that the faces could be quads rather than triangles, and didn't actually have to be flat. This meant that simple solids, like missiles or gun barrels, could be reduced to tetrahedrons, and drawn using one quad each. Over time, I figured out how to extend the technique to things like water splashes and smoke clouds."

"The terrain for each level was generated procedurally from a very low-res map – just



» [Amiga] The map screen has a neat superimposed game window so you can fly and navigate simultaneously.



> "I couldn't figure out how to refuel the helicopter, so I asked myself, 'What would Gerry Anderson do?'"
>
> Andy Wilton



an ASCII block, basically – and then the roads, buildings, spawn points and vehicle paths were scripted by hand, entering numbers, testing the resulting level and iterating until the mission played correctly. I don't think I created very many of the levels that went into the first game, most of this work was done by Jim Gardner, Andy Smith and Bob Wade. I think they nailed it."

One of the main joys of *Zeewolf* is controlling its nimble helicopter, and getting the feel of the game right was something that was always important to Andrew and the team. "I loved games with realistic physics in them," he says. "*Thrust* was the revelation here, and David Braben did an awesome job translating the tilt-and-burn style into 3D in *Virus*, so I wanted to incorporate that. Landing was very hard in *Virus*, though, so I added landing legs to cushion the impact and be a bit more forgiving."

Even today, Andy shares the opinion with veteran *Zeewolf* players that the mouse control system was the optimum way to play the game. "The joystick control took ages and was very hard to get right," he reveals. "This may be my own bias showing through, though. I much preferred the mouse, and resented spending time on the joystick mode when I felt it was never going to be really satisfactory. I stand by that now – analogue controls are just better for that kind of thing."

The finished game included an impressive 32 varied missions spread over a network of contoured patchwork-quilt islands, from *Choplifter*-style search-and-rescue missions to full-scale enemy base assaults. One neat touch was that players were able to make use of friendly AI Buffalo tanks that could be airlifted to trouble spots and left to slug it out against enemy forces. Rounding off the package was an impressive title screen logo, so huge it couldn't all fit on the screen at once. This was designed by renowned fantasy artist Paul Kidby. "I didn't know Paul myself, but the other guys knew him through Future Publishing so we commissioned him for the wolf's head logo, and he did a fantastic job," says Andy. "Then the *Discworld* work came along and catapulted him to fame, so he never had time to do us a new one for *Zeewolf 2*, and we had to reuse the old one…"



» [Amiga] A nice Easter egg – using password 'frampage' lets you play as a Kestrel VTOL plane like that of the prototype of *Zeewolf*.

On release, *Zeewolf* received rave reviews from the Amiga press, which praised the game's control system, graphics and mission-based design. "I was very relieved," Andy admits. "I really believed in the game, but after two years working on something you've got no objectivity left, so it was a huge relief to have other people say they liked it. It meant a lot. Commercially the game did pretty well – ridiculously small sales in today's terms – around 20,000 copies, but a solid success by the standards of the Amiga market at that time."

Andrew, however, agrees that *Zeewolf* came perhaps a little late in the Amiga's life to be a true blockbuster smash. "We did in fact get Atari ST and Sega Mega Drive versions of the game running, but it basically missed the boat on those platforms. As for PC and the first 3D-centric consoles, we felt that it was just too primitive-looking to port successfully. Now, the low-poly look is fashionable, but nothing's as out of date as last year's fashion, and that's what *Zeewolf* was by 1995, so we moved on." However, the modest success of the game allowed room for one more sequel.

"*Zeewolf 2* was largely coded by Nick Vincent," says Andy. "He took the original engine, optimised and improved it in various ways, lost some of the more exotic kinds of graphics (the cooling towers of the first game were crazily complicated to render) but overall added a ton of cool stuff. In design terms our main aim was more variety, which was where the extra vehicles came in. This certainly added complexity, but the game was starting from a working engine and an existing set of vehicles and weapons, so overall it was considerably quicker."

"I'm really proud of the games and I hope the other guys are too," comments Andy, adding that the possibility of a modern update, as often suggested by retro gaming fans on YouTube and Amiga fan sites, might not be a bad idea at all. "I think a remake would be kind of pointless, but if someone were to take the feel and look of the game and extend it somehow, make their idea of what *Zeewolf 3* should have been, I'd give it a play." *



» [Amiga] Taking out enemy radar tanks greatly reduces the effectiveness of enemy surface-to-air missile attacks.

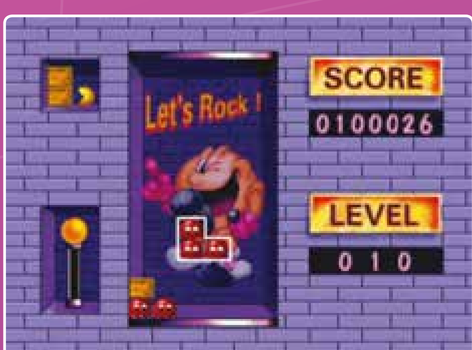
ENGINEERING INTERACTIVITY

CD

They say good things come to those who wait, so what happened with the CD-i? In development for seven years, it has long been considered a flop. But was it all bad? David Crookes takes a closer look

Pick up a copy of the magazine, *New Computer Express* from 3 November 1990 and nestled in the corner of page seven you will find a 300-word news article about Philips CD-i. The caption beneath a photograph of the machine contains the words, "at last", while the intro tells its readers: "Philips has finally released its multimedia Compact Disc Interactive (CD-i) system." But what three things can we deduce from this small piece?

Well, the first is that there had been a wait. And, boy, had there been: work had actually begun on the CD-i in 1984. The second is that it was a "system". Not a console, not a video player but something else entirely. The third was that *New Computer Express* wasn't wholly excited that it had finally seen the light of day. But perhaps that is because it was only being released to business and professional users at that time. Consumers, it transpired, would have to wait a bit longer.

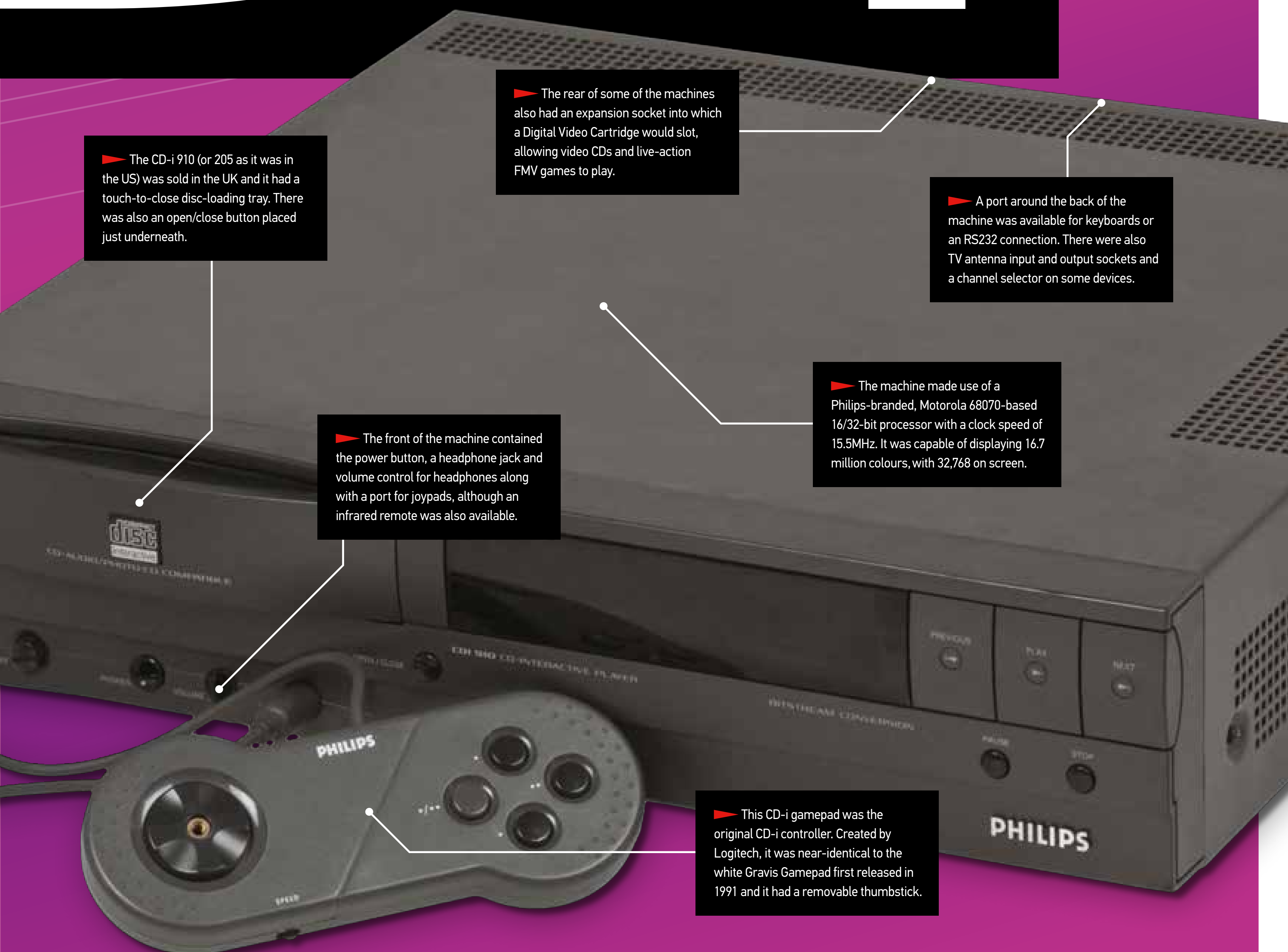


» [CD-i] No munching of dots here, instead *Pac-Panic* was a riff on *Tetris*.

Today, the CD-i is something of a curiosity, a true multimedia machine that tried to be everything to everyone. It allowed owners to play music, 'enjoy' karaoke, watch movies and bask in the knowledge gleaned from encyclopedias, such as Compton's. More importantly to us, though, it allowed for the playing of games: some good, some ugly and some that really needed to be taken out and burned. For this was a machine which made it acceptable to even want to chuck games starring Nintendo characters on to the pyre. And yet the CD-i wasn't entirely bad by any means.

There was certainly no faulting Philips' ambition. The Dutch company had begun the project with the intention of creating a compact disc that could allow for the playing of audio, graphics and text. Sony had been attempting the same and by 1985, they were working together to establish a format. Matsushita also became involved and it was working on developing integrated circuits. Meanwhile, Microsoft had been approached, too, since the other companies sought to make use of its successful operating system, MS-DOS.





The CD-i 910 (or 205 as it was in the US) was sold in the UK and it had a touch-to-close disc-loading tray. There was also an open/close button placed just underneath.

The rear of some of the machines also had an expansion socket into which a Digital Video Cartridge would slot, allowing video CDs and live-action FMV games to play.

A port around the back of the machine was available for keyboards or an RS232 connection. There were also TV antenna input and output sockets and a channel selector on some devices.

The machine made use of a Philips-branded, Motorola 68070-based 16/32-bit processor with a clock speed of 15.5MHz. It was capable of displaying 16.7 million colours, with 32,768 on screen.

The front of the machine contained the power button, a headphone jack and volume control for headphones along with a port for joypads, although an infrared remote was also available.

This CD-i gamepad was the original CD-i controller. Created by Logitech, it was near-identical to the white Gravis Gamepad first released in 1991 and it had a removable thumbstick.



» [CD-i] By the time Ashley Hogg made *Micro Machines*, he was fairly sure that it wasn't going to succeed, but he got a fixed fee rather than royalties.



» [CD-i] The flop fighting game *Rise Of The Robots* got an outing on the CD-i.

The system was to be announced at a conference run by Microsoft in Seattle on 7 March 1986. By that time, the details of this new standard were being noted in what was called the 'Green Book', a follow-up to the Red Book that had covered the standard for music CDs. Bernie Luskin, who had joined Philips just weeks before in January, became chairman of the Green Book Specifications Committee. "I flew around and had meetings with all of the early leaders to find out the specifications that they would like to have in an interactive program," he tells us. "We then turned it over to the engineers and they worked up those specs, translating them engineering-wise."

Bernie was among those flown to Seattle for the announcement, and he recalls going to the Sheraton Hotel where he spent the Thursday and Friday night in the company of Bill Gates. "At the time I joined, Microsoft was the smallest company involved with the CD-i system but I thought we had a great relationship with Bill," he continues. This, alas, was not to last. Behind the scenes, Philips and Sony had been talking to a company called Microware which had developed the real-time, process-based multitasking operating system, OS-9 for the Motorola 6809 microprocessor.

On the Saturday morning, I came out the elevator and the president of Philips Home Interactive Systems motioned me over," says Bernie, who went on to become president of Philips Interactive Media. "He said, 'I just want you know that we're not going to work with Microsoft any more. Bill Gates is too difficult and so we're not using MS-DOS. We're going to use OS-9.'"

Back then, that decision wasn't hugely controversial. Philips had evaluated different operating systems from around 60 companies. But Bill was understandably unhappy at having been dropped. "I saw him on that Saturday and he was very upset," Bernie says. A few months later, Microsoft then sought to buy Microware but its president Ken Kaplan refused. Ken countered with an offer to create a joint venture which Bill decided against. The upshot was that OS-9 ended up being used by CD-i, albeit in a reworked form known as CD-RTOS. "I think it is one of the most significant misjudgments," Bernie laments.

The problem, he explains, was that, "OS-9 wasn't adapted to compact disc but we had to integrate it. So when I was hosting meetings and talking to engineers, writing down the specifications that we'd like to have and what we could do with it, we had to do it with OS-9 in mind. I think it set development back by maybe three years because MS-DOS had lots of software companies developing for it whereas OS-9 was nowhere near as formidable and it didn't have the same level of producer base. We had to train people to work with it, which took a long time to do."

The system's specs were finally issued in March 1987 and licensees began to see demos of CD-i discs and prototypes three months later. Despite these advances, however, it wasn't until some 18 months later that developers began to receive dev kits. And although work had begun on other coloured books, the important White book which set the standards for the CD-i Bridge for Video CDs, Super Video CDs and Photo CDs, was still some five years away.

"There were some titles in development when I joined Philips" recalls David McElhatten, who was

KEY PLAYERS

Developers that supported the CD-i



SPINNAKER SOFTWARE

■ Having developed a reputation for creating educational software, Spinnaker was signed up to produce seven launch titles for the CD-i. Its titles included *Alice In Wonderland*, *Laser Lords* and *Paint School I* and *Paint School II* but once it had fulfilled its contract brief, the company decided to cease creating software for the machine.



THE VISION FACTORY

■ This Dutch developer, also known as SPC Vision, made a decent number of games for the CD-i, starting in 1993 with *Alien Gate* (which amazed Philips when the company first saw it). Although it had a small team of around ten developers, it also released *Steel Machine*, *The Apprentice*, *Sports Freaks* and *Accelerator* and it ported *Dimo's Quest* from the Amiga.



CAPITOL DISC INTERACTIVE

■ Formed in an equal partnership between Philips Interactive Media and Capitol Video Communications, this company initially intended to make programs for the government and businesses. But it developed the live-action games *Mad Dog McCree*, *Crime Patrol* and *Who Shot Johnny Rock?* along with digital renditions of Go, Backgammon, Connect Four and pinball.

hired in October 1988 as the senior vice-president of production for what was then American Interactive Media. "But it was a very immature environment. I remember there was a golf game called *The Palm Springs Open,* which had just been started, and I recall we had to get a good number of titles out for launch at the same point. It was a very big effort."

One of the problems was that the decision to ditch Microsoft had begun to distract Philips. "Sony had the patents on audio and it wouldn't release the rights to Microsoft, preventing Bill's company from integrating audio on CD-ROM," explains Bernie. "They ended up battling with lawyers for two or three years and it was slowing things down on both sides." Still, work continued. "They told me that my job was to make about 75 programs: so ten children's programs, ten adult programs, reference education programs, games and so on," says Bernie. Only, at that stage, gaming wasn't first and foremost on Philips' mind.

"In the US, we had a committee that wasn't very game-friendly," David says. Instead, Philips favoured the edutainment market. Fortunately, it proved rather good at creating such titles: Bernie worked with the Children's Television Workshop on developing *Sesame Street* programs. There was also a *Time-Life 35mm Photography CD* which let users focus a simulated camera on a moving image and take a virtual photo.

"We wanted original titles that had a lot of really high visibility and we were making a lot of breakthroughs," says Bernie. "Even when I was getting flack, I knew that we were getting somewhere." A lot of Bernie's time was spent assembling teams or writing up contracts with developers. "I was sitting reviewing proposals all day long and financing the titles I felt would work," he tell us. The CD-i developers were starting to understand what made the machine tick.

"The kids games for the CD-i were standing out," says David. "It made the machine a novel edutainment system and it was a market that was not being covered by other machines. The computer business was

INFOGRAMES

■ Philips sold its gaming subsidiary, Philips Media BV, to Infogrames in 1996 but the French publisher had already created a number of CD-i titles by that point. They included *International Tennis Open* in 1993, *Marco Polo* in 1994, and *Asterix: Caesar's Challenge* and *Chaos Control* in 1995. Infogrames followed this up by releasing *Solar Crusade* in 1996.

CD WHY!?

The four different Philips CD-i models



200 SERIES (LEFT)

The widely-available 200 series kicked off with the most basic, yet debut, 205 model, which was called 910 in the UK. A higher-end 220 then followed, which hid the CD drawer with a door and had up to 32KB RAM, while the 210 model kept with 8KB and had no door.



300 SERIES (RIGHT)

As if to underline that the CD-i was not first and foremost a games console, Philips introduced the 310, 350, 360 and 370 models which contained a hard drive and, in most cases, a screen and were aimed at industry professionals. They were popular among sales reps in pharmaceutical companies looking to promote their wares to clients.



400 SERIES (ABOVE)

Aimed at the educational market, the 450, 470 and 490 models were the ones which most closely resembled a games console rather than riff on an old VCR. There was no infrared eye or display panels and CDs were inserted after popping open the top disc cover. A one-handed controller was bundled.

600 SERIES

Those involved in software development, or who wanted to run professional apps, were steered towards the 601, 602, 604, 605, 615, 660 and 670 models. The 602 introduced support for floppy discs, the 615 would communicate with other 615s and it was possible to control a DVD player using the 670.

HALL OF SHAME The worst games on CD-i



LINK: THE FACES OF EVIL

■ There were actually three *Zelda* games for the CD-i. The truth? All were disappointing. While actually praised at the time, there were two side-scrolling platforming RPGs with god-awful animated cutscenes (*Faces Of Evil* and *Wand Of Gamelon*) and one top-down game (*Adventure*) with laughable live-action scenes.



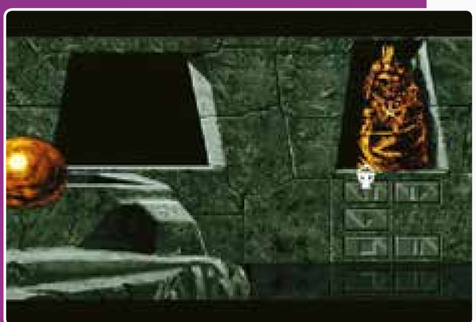
CONNECT FOUR

■ The CD-i was supposed to present the future of entertainment but committing the 1974 Milton Bradley game, Connect Four, to compact disc in 1991 hardly showcased the machine's capabilities. Players simply took it in turns to point at a column to get four in a row. Other games included Backgammon and Battleship.



DARK CASTLE

■ Originally released on the Mac in 1986, *Dark Castle* was released for the CD-i in 1992. But while it looked and sounded great, David McElhatten said the developers wrestled with "getting sprites to blit on the screen, which was something the system was not designed for". Poor controls destroyed it.



» [CD-i] Published by Sierra On-Line, *Inca* mixed genres such as adventure and space combat.



nascent in terms of CD-ROM titles that catered to that audience and it was a real strength of Philips."

Such an emphasis on edutainment meant that for every *Tetris*, there were more than a few *Treasures Of The Smithsonian* being produced. "*Treasures* caught everyone's imagination because we could make 3D models of museum exhibits," Bernie says. "We were also able to do things which had never been done before, down to simple stuff like the first interactive children's colouring book."

As if to underline how important Philips believed the CD-i to be, it invested heavily not only in its staff but also its infrastructure. It had plush offices at 10960 Wilshire Boulevard, close to LA's business district. "They wanted to have the headquarters in Hollywood and knew this was going to be a big entertainment product," says Bernie. Philips took up three floors of that building and leased a number of large buildings in the area. More offices later opened in Europe (in London) and Asia but it wasn't until 1991 – seven years after the original idea – that the CD-i was unleashed on to the masses.

By this point, over 100 developers and tech producers were on board. But while the CD-i went down well at CES, it cost an eye-watering $1,400. It also needed an add-on cartridge to achieve full-motion video (costing £179.99 when the CD-i made it to the UK). Still, the system looked nice enough, with its video recorder styling. It also came with RS232c communication ports that allowed it to connect to a network.

> "There was a fanaticism in the UK that was pretty unique"
> David McElhatten

Sales of the CD-i were slow and just 100,000 units were sold in the first year. But then, at that point CDs were by no means a novelty: the Commodore CDTV, Mega-CD and PC Engine CD-ROM 2 were already available and the format was starting to make inroads on PCs and Macs. Philips began turning to games. As well as releasing a version of the CD-i that looked like a console, it could also fall back on a deal struck with Nintendo – one which led to a handful of *Zelda* and *Mario* titles being released.

How this came about is curious. Nintendo had approached Sony to create a CD add-on for the SNES, along with a hybrid called the 'Play Station'. Yet the contract Nintendo signed gave Sony a large amount of control. When Nintendo tried to get out of the deal, Sony refused to back down. Nintendo then approached Philips, leading to drama at CES in June 1991.

While Sony unveiled the Play Station, Nintendo announced it was working with Philips. Ultimately, Sony went on to create the PlayStation and the Philips CD add-on for the SNES came to nothing. But Philips ended up with the rights to produce games based on Nintendo characters, which is why three *Zelda* games were released along with *Hotel Mario* in 1993 and 1994.

Unfortunately, few of these games were good. The attempts to turn the *Zelda* games into cinematic experiences fell flat and the trilogy became infamous. Luckily, there were some standout titles to relieve the pain including a conversion of the acclaimed horror puzzler, *The 7th Guest*. "We had a hard time coming up with all the assets we used to make the game for them," says its original creator Graeme Devine. "We





CHAOS CONTROL

■ If Philips was hoping to compete against the PlayStation in 1995, it should have canned this game. Having attempted to win over players based on its superb prerendered graphics, it soon became clear that players could only aim a pointer and shoot – there was no way to control movement through the environment.



HOTEL MARIO

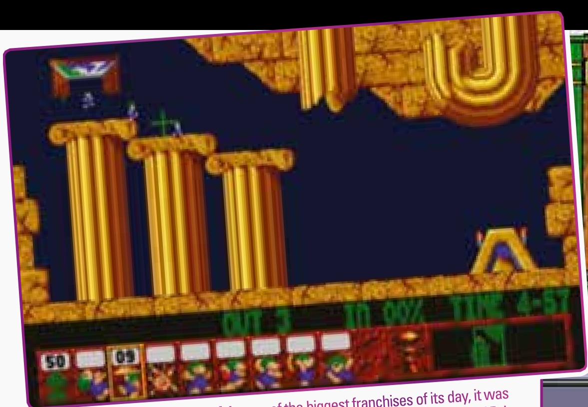
■ As well as having the rights to make a game based on *The Legend Of Zelda*, Philips also secured *Mario*. As before, Nintendo didn't get involved in the development process and the result was the worst puzzler involving the plucky ex-plumber. Jump, avoid nasties, move between floors, hide behind doors. Repeat.



© Evan Amos

» [CD-i] *A Visit To Sesame Street: Numbers* was a popular and colourful edutainment title for kids.





» [CD-i] As one of the biggest franchises of its day, it was inevitable *Lemmings* would appear on CD-i.

were a company that stored all our data at that time on DAT drives because we could only afford a 500MB hard drive and fit one room onto the server at a time. But it was one of the first games on CD-i to require the MPEG-1 cartridge."

The port of *The 7th Guest* was handled by Philips' team in the UK, a group that became very important. "The people we assembled on Tottenham Court Road in London were great," affirms David, who went on to head up a new games publishing division of Philips Interactive Media in 1994. "The UK had a very rich development community. There was a fanaticism in the UK that was pretty unique." Philips looked for other UK talent, too, asking Codemasters to port *Micro Machines*. This task fell to Ashley Hogg who had spoken to Philips a couple of years earlier when he was curious about working on titles for the CD-i.

Ashley bemoaned the CD-i's limited clock speed and development system, though. "[Working on the] CD-i was the first time I had to use a PC as a workstation and it felt like working in the dark ages," he tells us. Ashley also highlights its reasonable graphics capabilities, "although nothing like the blitter-powered Amiga or the dedicated sprite and playfield hardware such as in the Mega Drive". He adds: "It had decent resolution with a good number of colours and some degree of hardware support for being able to scroll the display around – but it needed CPU code to achieve the full multi-way scrolling and the sprite drawing."

By the time *Micro Machines* was released in 1994, games such as *Voyeur* were helping the machine to realise its potential. "*Voyeur* was very big at the time and probably the most full-motion videogame around," David says. "We also had *Burn Cycle* which, I would say at the time, was one of the best games on the market across a lot of different genres. And we had *The Apprentice* which was one of the best CD-i games ever and my favourite. It's just a classic."

There were pioneering non-gaming titles, too. *No World Order* by Todd Rundgren was a music-only interactive CD, for instance, which could create an infinite number of versions of each song. There were also titles based around frivolous hits – the LaserDisc live-actioner *Mad Dog McCree* rubbed shoulders with offerings based on TV game shows. PolyGram – which was controlled by Philips – snapped up the Motown record label and picked off some of its big names for CD-i releases while Philips Interactive Media of America produced full-motion video music titles including U2's *Achtung Baby* and McCartney's *Put It There*.

Philips also signed a deal with Paramount to bring 50 films to CD-i, while personal trainer Kelly Smith released what she claimed was the first truly interactive home workout program. Brighton-based Epic Interactive Media created the explicit FMV, *The Joy of Sex*. It was originally going to create a pop quiz but the deal was never signed leaving Epic with £100,000 of CD-i equipment it needed to do something with.

Even so, David McElhatten admitted in 1994 that CD-i wasn't designed for high-performance games. The system struggled to make an impact in the USA. "Philips had a better name in Europe than it did in the USA where it was pretty clear the machine was going to be very cold," David tells us. Sadly, while Philips wanted software to account for a third of its income by 2000, the CD-i ended up being discontinued in 1998.

The problem was that Philips misread the market and by the time it made great strides in fixing it, the PlayStation was making its mark. Bernie believes the criticism of the CD-i over the years has not been fair. CD-i blended into MPEG and evolved into the internet and the cloud, he affirms, and many of the breakthroughs, he argues, will continue to be foundational in interactive media long into the future.

"CD-i was a monstrous success," he concludes. "We overcame the problems of creating the standards and the pressing plants. We had underlying patents that are still visible and from which Philips made fortunes and continues to make fortunes. The CD-i was a small part of a very big picture. Yes there were mistakes, but it will always be a great success." *

Peripheral Vision

Taiko Controller Fact

■ *Taiko No Tatsujin* isn't the only drumming game series for PS2 – the *DrumMania*, *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero* series all use drums too, and each have their own unique standard.

ESSENTIAL GAME Taiko Drum Master

Unless you're capable of reading Japanese, this North American release will be the easiest entry point into the *Taiko No Tatsujin* series for you. That's not just because the text is in English, mind – it's also got a range of songs you're more likely to have heard of, including Britney Spears' *Toxic* and party standards like *Love Shack* and *Tubthumping*, so it's an easier sell when you bust out the Tatacon at your next barbecue. Plus, it's got the theme from *Dragon Ball Z* for those who want nothing more than to rock out to anime music on their own.





Taiko Controller

» **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION 2 » **RELEASED:** 2002 » **COST:** $49.99 (LAUNCH, WITH GAME), £15+ (TODAY, NO GAME)

For some reason, there aren't too many games themed around traditional Japanese taiko drumming, so when Namco introduced its hit arcade music game *Taiko No Tatsujin* to the home in 2002, it had to manufacture a bespoke controller to go along with it. The result was the Tatacon (also known as the Taiko Controller overseas), a small home drum with a three-part plastic stand and two plastic drumsticks. The Tatacon won't register any timid hits, and is robust and hardy enough to deal with the firm strikes required. It can sense strikes in two different areas – the outer rim of the drum, and the centre of the drum, corresponding to blue notes and red notes respectively in the *Taiko No Tatsujin* games.

Despite being a single-series peripheral, the Tatacon was given plenty of support in Japan. Namco released ten PS2 *Taiko No Tatsujin* games in just over four years, with the average game featuring well over 30 songs. The company also decided to bring the series to North America in the form of the one-off release *Taiko Drum Master,* which featured 31 songs and included the Tatacon as standard. Unfortunately Namco hasn't seen fit to release further entries in the series in the US, and has never brought the series to Europe. *

Ultimate Guide to Shock Troopers



Although top-down shooters were surprisingly rare on the Neo-Geo, Shock Troopers made the side-scrollers quake in fear. Chris Scullion gears up for our Ultimate Guide

The plot in *Shock Troopers* is as wafer thin as you'd expect from an arcade run-and-gun game. A terrorist group known as Bloody Scorpions has kidnapped a scientist and his daughter Cecilia, in the hope they can force the scientist to give them the formula to Alpha-301, a drug that can turn normal soldiers into superhuman ones. It's up to Cecilia's boyfriend Jackal and the rest of the Shock Troopers to head to the Bloody Scorpions' headquarters and rescue the pair.







» [Arcade] As is the case in many retro games with too much action, there are plenty of moments where slowdown kicks in.

Naturally, all this simply serves as an excuse to empty an endless supply of bullets into as many nameless armed goons as possible, and in that respect *Shock Troopers* is a great success. Played from an overhead perspective, your job is to take your chosen soldier(s) through a number of stages, killing everyone in your path including the various bosses and sub-bosses you encounter along the way. As well as the standard tropes you'd expect from a game of its type – an endless stream of bullets every time you hold down the fire button, a finite supply of powerful bombs you can use to clear the screen or greatly damage bosses – there's also a dodge button which lets your character do a quick roll in any direction. This makes your character temporarily invincible, letting you roll through bullets and missiles as if they were made of marshmallows. It also increases the game's difficulty as a result, though: boss fights regularly end up with explosives flying at you from all directions as you're expected to use the dodge to avoid them.

The dodge mechanic is only one way in which *Shock Troopers* mixes up the shooter genre. There are a few other interesting features, all revolving around player choice: something that's usually ▶

ROLL CALL

The heroes of Shock Troopers

JACKAL



SPEED ★★☆
ENERGY ★★☆
WEAPON ★★☆

The main protagonist, it's Jackal's girlfriend who's been kidnapped by the Bloody Scorpions. Like most lead characters in games like this, his stats are average across the board. His bomb is a basic grenade.

MILKY



SPEED ★★★
ENERGY ★☆☆
WEAPON ★★☆

The first of three female characters, Milky is all about the guns. She's so gun-happy that she's the only character whose 'melee' attack actually involves shooting the enemy from point-blank range with a handgun.

LOKI



SPEED ★★☆
ENERGY ★★☆
WEAPON ★★☆

Much like Jackal, Loki has average stats. The difference is he looks a lot cooler because of his action movie-style haircut. His bomb is actually a rocket launcher, which can hit enemies on the other side of the screen.

SOUTHERN CROSS



SPEED ★☆☆
ENERGY ★★★
WEAPON ★★★

A hefty chap with only a vest and fetching yellow trousers to his name, Southern Cross is slow but has a powerful double-barrelled weapon. Rather than bombs, he's armed with exploding boomerangs.

MARIE BEE



SPEED ★★★
ENERGY ★☆☆
WEAPON ★★☆

It's not clear who'd play as Marie when Milky is almost identical but slightly better. She's fast but has low health, and she doesn't get as many medal ratings on each level. Her bomb is a homing missile, so there's that at least.

RIO



SPEED ★★☆
ENERGY ★★☆
WEAPON ★★☆

Rio's an odd one because it's not quite clear whether he's a stereotype of Native Americans or an imitation of Rambo. His tendency to fire arrows suggests the former, the fact those arrows explode suggests the latter.

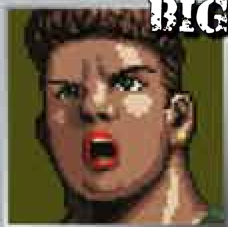
MARU



SPEED ★☆☆
ENERGY ★★☆
WEAPON ★★★

The hero most suitably dressed for the occasion, Maru has a long-sleeved shirt and small shades. He's slow and powerful like a big character, but can't take as much damage. His bombs disperse poisonous gas.

BIG MAMA



SPEED ★☆☆
ENERGY ★★★
WEAPON ★★★

Questionable name aside, Big Mama is the strongest character in the game. She's slow but can take a lot of damage, and instead of bombs she can fire huge rockets that create enormous explosions and wipe out multiple enemies.







» [Arcade] Hold down the fire button to lock the direction you're aiming. This lets you strafe around without breaking aim.

lacking in a game of its type. For starters, it's essentially three adventures in one. At the start of the game, players are asked to choose one of three routes: Jungle, Valley or Mountain. Each route offers a completely different set of five levels before culminating in the final stage. This means you could play through the game to completion three times and only the last level would be the same. After the third stage you're given the option to change your route, just in case you fancy a change: should you choose to switch paths you'll play through an extra level in which you ride atop a moving train to your destination. In total, then, the game has 17 stages – three routes with five in each, the final stage and the optional train stage – and in a single playthrough you'll get six or seven of them, depending on whether you switch routes.

The level of choice extends to the heroes, too. There are no fewer than eight different Shock Troopers to choose from – the character select screen looks more like a fighting game than a shooter – each with their own stats in speed, endurance and weapon power. These aren't generic grunts, either: each is a fully-fleshed-out character with their own unique special bomb attacks, their own close-range attacks and their own 'level clear' animations. The character's stats also change depending on

ITS ESSENTIALLY THREE ADVENTURES IN ONE GAME

BOSS RUSH

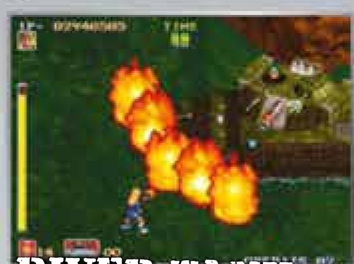
How to beat Shock Troopers' toughest enemies



TANK

The most common boss of *Shock Troopers*, this massive tank appears at the end of five of the game's 17 possible stages. Each time it's a different colour and fires slightly different bullets, but the tank sprite is identical for every encounter and is just recoloured.

HOW TO BEAT IT The tank is one of the easier bosses because of its size and the way it telegraphs its moves. Just keep your guns focused on it and roll through the missiles as and when you need to.



RIVER TANK

Similar to the standard tank boss, this one rocks up while you're making your way up the river. As well as standard bullets, this one also lobs fire bombs that split into smaller shots when they land, so it's a little trickier to beat than its ground-based counterpart.

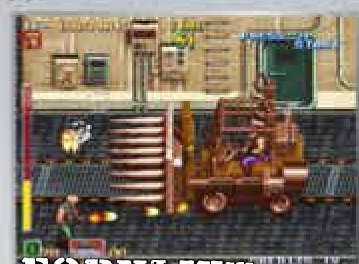
HOW TO BEAT IT The river tank fires most of its shots forward so approach it at an angle. When you see the driver pop his head up, that means the tank's about to start firing missiles so get ready to dodge.



HELICOPTER

Bosses like this show that *Shock Troopers* was clearly influenced by Capcom's *Mercs*, which featured an extremely similar battle. As you'd expect, this chopper descends from the top of the screen and starts giving it welly until you manage to bring it down.

HOW TO BEAT IT It may be intimidating but it's easy to beat. It'll start by firing just its main guns, so you can easily avoid these while firing. Then, when it starts firing missiles just keep rolling around until it stops and fire back.



FORKLIFT

Forklifts are dangerous at the best of times: you wouldn't want to be run over by one, after all. A forklift carrying an enormous set of spikes, though? That's something even the most lax health and safety inspector would have a tough time passing.

HOW TO BEAT IT Head to the bottom corner and shoot at the forklift at an angle. This will avoid most shots except for the bombs that split up (roll to avoid these). After a while it'll start ramming but if you stay at the bottom, it'll miss.



» [Arcade] *Shock Troopers* features a fair amount of variety. On this stage, you're climbing up a mountainside while laying waste to enemies.

the level: before you start a new stage certain characters will be given a stat boost. This was made clear with a star system in the original release of the game, where players would get a message explicitly telling them their character's stats were being increased. A later revised version – the one most commonly available – removed these messages, but the stat boosts still remained behind the scenes.

Choosing a character is one thing, but you also get to choose how many you get to control. The game can be played in two modes: Team Battle has you picking three different characters and lets you swap between them at will with the D button, whereas the unfortunately spelled 'Lonly Wolf' mode lets you select a single hero instead. In the first version released, players only get a single life with an energy bar (if you played in Team Battle the three characters shared the same bar), but this was changed in the revised second edition, presumably because inexperienced players were able to get Game Over in less than a minute. In the second version, players are given three lives – either all three for their single character in

LOCK AND LOAD

All the firepower you'll need



NORMAL

The standard gun fires a decent spray. It's available in single and double-barrelled versions: which one you get to use depends on the strength of your chosen character.



3WAY

As expected, 3Way lets you fire three shots at once. The power's the same, but get close enough to an enemy and all three bullets can hit at once, trebling its strength.



FLAME

A classic flamethrower. It can fire a flame shot, but keep the button held down and after a while a long burst starts. The animation of burning enemies is pretty special.



HEAVY

A more powerful version of your standard gun, as depicted by the larger bullets. If you get a Heavy, try to melee human enemies to save your bullets for tanks.



VULCAN

Even more powerful than the Heavy, the Vulcan is just a thicker and wider spray of Heavy bullets. It can bring down larger vehicles with ease, so save its bullets, too.



BUSTER

A beast of a weapon that fires like a machine gun, has the power of the Vulcan but also sets things on fire, like the flamethrower. It only turns up on rare occasions.



ROCKET

A rocket launcher with a generous supply of ammo. The rockets fire slower than standard bullets, but if you manage to hit even close to your target, the damage is serious.



MISSILE

The next level up from the rocket launcher, the missile launcher fires four missiles at once, each doing similar damage to a rocket. Rarer than good *Army Men* games.



BOMBER

At one point during the Valley route, you'll find yourself on a boat. Suddenly, this giant plane will approach from a distance and fly above you, dropping bombs and soldiers on you at a rate that can only be described as 'irritating'.

HOW TO BEAT IT The bomber's actually not as tough as it looks. Its main gun fires slow bullets that are easily dodged. After a while it'll open up a hatch and start dropping enemies and rockets, both of which can be destroyed before they reach you.



TANK DRIVER

Sometimes when you destroy a tank boss its driver will jump out and continue the assault on foot. In the Valley route and the Train stage you'll even encounter him on his own. He's well armed, packing a Heavy machine gun and pipe bombs.

HOW TO BEAT THEM Watch when he cocks his gun. If he moves to the corner after he does it, he's going to start firing his machine gun while moving his way down the screen. If he stands still after doing it, he's going to fire regular shots at you. Learn these patterns, and you'll do fine.



THE LEADER

The boss of the Bloody Scorpions group has a massive hairdo and shoulder pads M Bison would be jealous of. In typical final boss fashion, you fight him atop a massive jet ship.

HOW TO BEAT THEM You'll be dodging a lot here as the Leader likes to shoot loads of projectiles. Keep your distance too, because he'll perform quick melee attacks.



MAP TO SUCCESS

Follow these tips and you might just survive, soldier

MOUNTAIN 1

The Mountain route kicks off with you walking through the bottom of a canyon, with enemies jumping down at you from the edges. After making your way past some landmines (use the dodge button), you meet one of the game's many tank bosses.

MOUNTAIN 2

One of the game's most varied levels. You start riding on the back of a giant truck, taking out parachuting enemies. The action then moves to a cliff edge which you have to climb, followed by a large rope ladder that has to be navigated, all while enemies fire at you from all angles.

MOUNTAIN 3

It would appear this mountain is more of a volcano, since the third stage has you making your way through a dangerous area covered in lava. You eventually reach a secret underground bunker, similar to the one in Jungle 5, featuring the same forklift boss.



MOUNTAIN 4

You're starting to reach the top of the mountain by this point. Little sprinklings of snow are scattered on the ground, and you can see clouds below you as you continue up. Once you get to the summit, you're welcomed by a helicopter that's armed to the teeth.



MOUNTAIN 5

For some reason you're back on the ground here. The enemy is well aware of your presence at this point, though, so as you make your way to its base you also have to avoid any falling bombs dropping on you from the overhead planes.



JUNGLE 5

After a final trek through the jungle you come across the Bloody Scorpions' factory, filled with all manner of jetpacking enemies and destroyable machinery. At the end, you'll go head-to-head with a large spiked forklift, which isn't very hospitable.

JUNGLE 2

This stage is split into two parts. In the first, you're riding a motorbike: you have to kill other bikers and destroy a big armoured vehicle. Then you jump your bike off a cliff edge and jump into a shallow river section, which somehow doesn't break all your bones.



JUNGLE 1

The first Jungle area has you wandering through a muddy clearing, taking out enemies, bunkers and tanks along the way while getting a feel for the controls. You then encounter a large helicopter while crossing a bridge before facing a large tank boss.

JUNGLE 4

It wouldn't be much of a videogame jungle without some ancient ruins somewhere: sure enough, the fourth stage dumps you in the middle of some. Make your way to the top and you'll be overlooking not only the sea, but a big helicopter looking for a fight.

JUNGLE 3

A lengthy one, this. Starting off in a marketplace, you eventually fight your way to a bar which is promptly destroyed by two goons wearing bladed gloves. Take them out and it's onto another jungle section where you'll meet another tank.



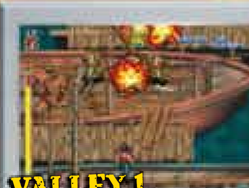
FINAL STAGE

To make things nice and dramatic, the final level takes place on top of the Bloody Scorpions' jet plane (which you obviously board by riding up to it on a motorbike and leaping across). There you'll face the Leader: pump him full of digital lead and it's job done.



VALLEY 5

You exit the sewer (via a huge pipe, naturally) and arrive at a run-down street, which has been taken over by the enemy. This street leads to the Bloody Scorpions' headquarters, though, so fight your way through and beat yet another tank to proceed.



VALLEY 1

Choose the Valley route and you'll start on a pier, making your way across a bunch of small fishing boats and trying to avoid the spears being fired at you by frogmen. Then you board a boat and take to the sea where a giant bomber plane attacks you.

TRAIN

After the third stage you get the option to switch to another route. If you do, you'll get this extra stage in which you board a speeding train, take out some jetpack enemies and face a tank driver boss. Stay on the same route to skip this level.



VALLEY 4

The entire fourth stage is set inside a sewer system: not quite the beautiful valley you may have had in mind when you first chose this route. Make your way through its samey-looking paths and destroy the tank at the end and this generic level is over.

VALLEY 3

This one starts with you jumping aboard a huge submarine-type vessel that's floating on the surface of the water. After fighting your way through the turret guns you get inside the ship and cause carnage from the inside, killing a tank driver at the end.

VALLEY 2

Apparently the boat didn't do so well, because the second stage starts with you walking through a river. After blowing up a huge bridge in the game's most impressive set-piece, you find a secret cave behind a waterfall and face off against, you guessed it, a tank.



» [Arcade] There are occasional sprite scaling tricks, usually when enemies or bombs drop down on you from above.

'Lonly Wolf' or each character getting their own energy bar in Team Battle. In this version the benefits of playing in Team Battle are clearer: since the trio no longer shares energy it's possible to add a tactical element to the game. You can now play as one character until they lose some health, then switch to another and melee some opponents to make them drop food, then switch back to the injured character and collect it. Alternatively, you can play through the stage as one of the faster characters – their weaker weaponry being enough to take out most normal enemies easily enough – then switch to a more powerful character once you have reached the level's boss encounter.

Brilliantly, the revised version also had a secret setting called 'hero' that the arcade owner could tweak from one to eight. If it was set to eight, the player could choose all eight Troopers in Team Battle and play through the game with an entire squad, juggling between them all at will. This is the best way to play *Shock Troopers*, but it's perhaps understandable that no arcade owner would ever activate it – essentially giving each player eight lives – if they actually wanted to make a profit.

Since it was only made available for the Neo-Geo MVS arcade systems and not the AES home consoles, playing *Shock Troopers* at home without emulating it was a tricky prospect until recently. It appeared around a decade ago on *SNK Arcade Classics Vol 1*: while the Wii version of this was fine, the PS2 and PSP ones suffered from long load times and slowdown. Recently, however, Hamster Corporation released *Shock Troopers* on Nintendo Switch as part of its *ACA Neo-Geo* series. This is easily the best way to play the game to date: not only does it run smoothly, it also gives you full access to the original game's settings: this means you can turn on the bloody deaths that were disabled by default for western arcades and – even better – activate that eight-character Team Battle mode. *Shock Troopers* is a game that passed a lot of people by back in the day: this new rerelease should hopefully let a new batch of gamers discover it for the first time and see why it's one of the best overhead shooters ever made. ★

A SHOCKING RETURN

Despite only being a modest success, *Shock Troopers* still managed to merit a sequel. While still a good game in its own right, *Shock Troopers: 2nd Squad* is one of those few sequels that offers less than its predecessor. There are only four characters, instead of eight, seven possible levels, instead of 17, and no Team Battle mode. The beautifully animated sprites of the original have been replaced with less charismatic prerendered characters, and the difficulty has been greatly increased, making for a more frustrating experience. Judged on its own merits, *2nd Squad* isn't a bad game by any means: the general feel of the original is intact and there are some brilliant boss fights against enormous machinery. Its biggest problem is that it inevitably draws comparisons with its bigger, better, more varied older brother, and in that respect it falls significantly short. A decent game, then, but the original *Shock Troopers* is the way to go.



» [Arcade] No run-and-gun is complete without a meaty array of over-the-top weapons and *Shock Troopers:2nd Squad* is no exception.



» [Arcade] Milky gets mobile in order to take down one of the bigger bosses.





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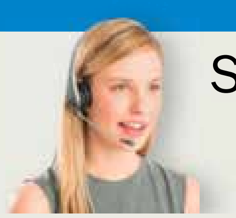
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In the chair with...

ROB ZDYBEL

Rob Zdybel joined Atari in the late Seventies and rode the rollercoaster right into the Nineties. He tells Paul Drury about programming, partying and gold toilet fittings

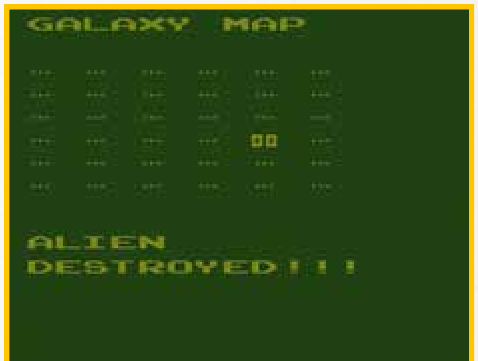
Few people have spent longer at Atari than *Rob Zdybel*. When he joined in 1979, the 2600 was just starting to gain momentum before really taking off with the release of *Space Invaders* as the new decade dawned. Rob was there for the party and the hangover which followed, witnessing the phenomenal success of the company and its ultimate demise from the inside. He made games for almost all of Atari's hardware, including the 8-bit computers, the 2600 and 5200 consoles, the Lynx, Jaguar and ST, and is brutally honest about what went wrong at Atari, as well as candid about what made it great. "The work was as fun as the partying," smiles Rob. "I had a blast!"

We've watched the excellent documentary *Once Upon Atari*, and in it your fellow 2600 programmer Rob Fulop describes you as 'the angriest man I ever met'. Will you be shouting at us during this interview?
I don't know why I get these 'angry' comments! I'm kind of a mellow guy. Maybe I was angry with him because he left the company to form Imagic and didn't take me with him? Ouch! But I liked Rob. I don't know why I get this rap. Yeah, I am pretty outspoken. I'll speak my mind, and maybe they mistake that for anger?

It is also obligatory to ask any former Atari employee how much time they spent in the infamous hot tub.
I was not a big hot tub guy, though I did attend a lot of 'MRB' meetings.

Sorry, what does MRB stand for?
Marijuana Review Board. If someone wanted to get a party going, they'd ask Pam the secretary to announce an MRB over the PA, which was code for 'Hey, there's a pot party on the roof, come on up!' A lot of smoking would go on in the women's restroom, too. In the end, people just started doing it in their offices. Tod [Frye – coder of *Pac-Man* on the Atari 2600] and I would smoke up our office all the time… and the ceilings were open so it'd spread all across the Atari building.

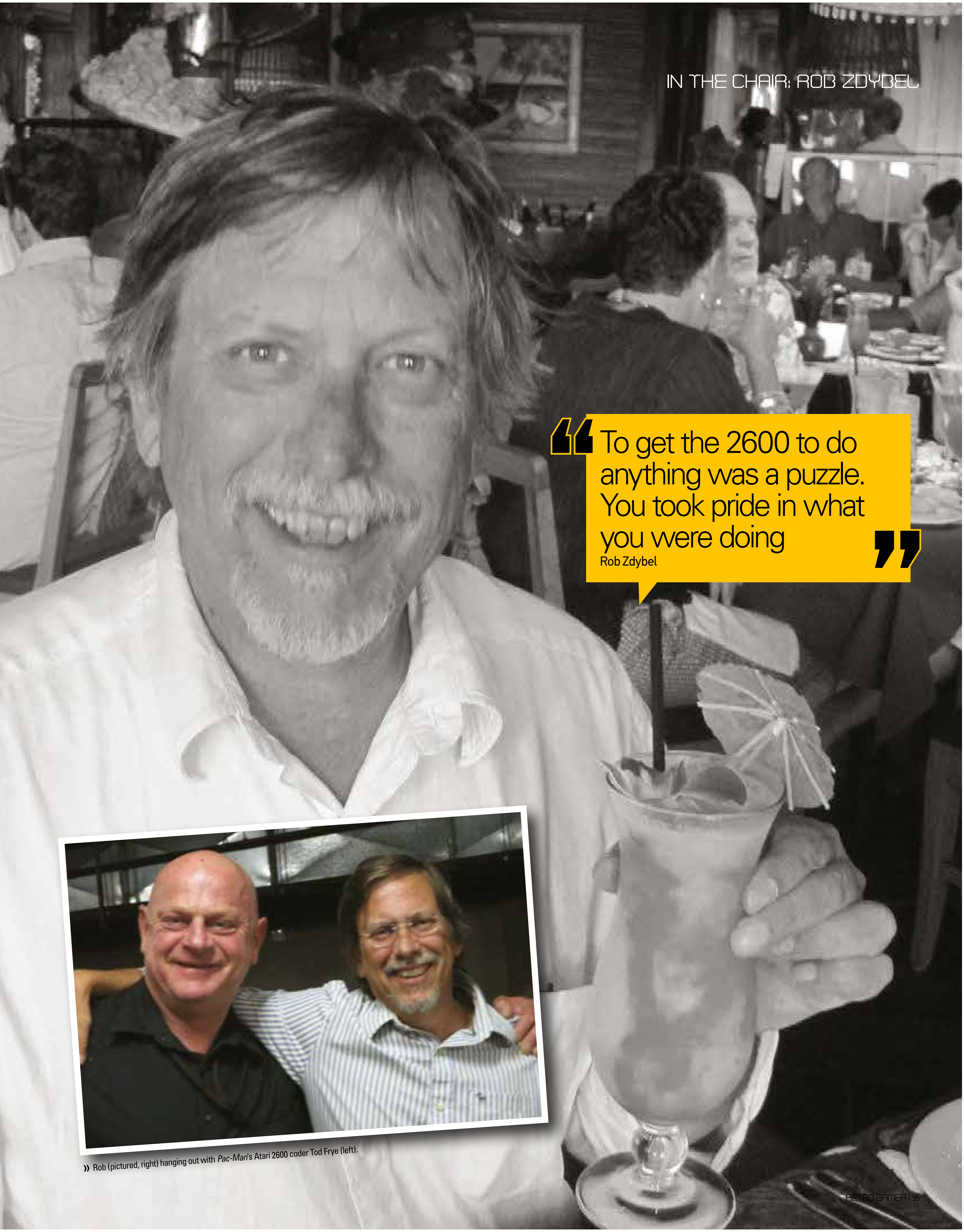
It's amazing you got any work done.
You gotta understand, the work was as fun as the partying. People came in at the weekend – you couldn't park your car in the parking lot on a Saturday, it was so full. To get the 2600 to do anything was a very interesting puzzle. You took pride in what you were doing because it was fun.



» [Atari 2600] Rob's first game for the 2600 was *Stellar Track*, which was released as a Sears-exclusive title.

Did you have much experience with computers before getting the job at Atari?
I did an Engineering Major at University of California, Berkeley, and I spent part of my course in the field, so my first computer related job was with the Navy. I had 'Top Secret' clearance [laughs]. We were using a primitive 8080 system which I thought was really sexy at the time. 8-bits? Wow! This was like 1977 and most processors at the time were 1-bit or 4-bit.

Did you get to play any games?
There were lots of games at the Lawrence Hall Of Science up the hill from the university campus, running on a mainframe, like *Colossal Caves*, *Hunt The Wumpus* and in one, you were commanding the Starship Enterprise. I copied that later!



> To get the 2600 to do anything was a puzzle. You took pride in what you were doing
> Rob Zdybel

» Rob (pictured, right) hanging out with *Pac-Man*'s Atari 2600 coder Tod Frye (left).

SELECTED TIMELINE

GAMES

- **STELLAR TRACK** [2600] 1981
- **REALSPORTS FOOTBALL** [2600] 1982
- **MISSILE COMMAND** [400/800/5200] 1982
- **PIGS IN SPACE STARRING MISS PIGGY** [2600] 1983
- **STAR RAIDERS** [ST] 1986
- **BUG HUNT** [400/800/XE] 1987
- **WARBIRDS** [LYNX] 1991
- **HOVER STRIKE** [JAGUAR] 1995
- **BATTLETANX** [N64] 1998
- **BATTLETANX: GLOBAL ASSAULT** [N64] 1999
- **WORLD DESTRUCTION LEAGUE: THUNDER TANKS** [PS2] 2000
- **THE SIMS 2** [VARIOUS] 2005
- **THE SIMPSONS GAME** [VARIOUS] 2007
- **SPIDER-MAN: WEB OF SHADOWS** [VARIOUS] 2008

A very simplified version of that became your first 2600 title, *Stellar Track*. Were you given a free hand to develop whatever game you liked?
When I started at what I now call 'Old Atari' in April 1979, it was a very unusual employer and one of the best I've ever seen. You arrived in 2600 land, they showed you to your office, showed you the development labs, gave you the technical manual – the one they gave me was Warren Robinett's [author of *Adventure* on the Atari 2600] old one with his name across it – and they said, 'Knock yourself out – make a game! Have a good time!' They were busy making their own games. This was pretty much an engineering-run organisation.

You decided to practically knock yourself out by coding an in-depth, tactical, turn-based *Star Trek* game, mainly using text, on the Atari 2600.



» [Atari 2600] Before Madden there was *RealSports Football*, which Rob coded for the 2600.

Weren't you tempted to just make a *Space Invaders* clone?
Listen, *Space Invaders* was fucking brilliant, pardon my French. Rick Mauer, [the coder], was a genius. He invented the 'moving six character' kernel and to make the machine do that was incredible. But there were lots of things being done in 2600 land that weren't *Space Invaders*. The hardware was only really designed to play *Tank* but we were getting it to do things no one imagined it was capable of. Like Brad Stewart doing *Asteroids*… and he also did *Code Breaker*. The only reason he did that was so he could practice his Morse Code for his ham radio licence! But he made it into a product which we shipped – because anything we shipped, sold.

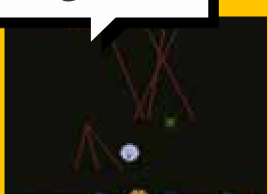
That's quite an interesting way to decide what games to make…
It wasn't just the engineers that were crazy. Wade Tuma got me working on the 850 Interface box because he wanted a device to run his model railroad! That's why it had all those ports on it. That's how the company was run. People would do shit because it was useful to them.

The 850 Interface became an incredibly useful peripheral for Atari's home computers. Did you enjoy working on hardware as well as developing software?
Oh, I miss working that close to the iron. And back then, hardware and software were hand in hand. Like in the Atari Coin-op [division], every team would have a hardware guy who could custom-build the hardware to suit the software. Now, I use Unity and god bless the people that wrote that, but I fucking hate working with other people's software.

Your next 2600 game was *RealSports Football*.
The story of how that came about is kind of amusing. I was asked to mock up a screen that would show a football game in progress on the 2600. They wanted 22 players on the screen which was strictly impossible if the players were to move, but this was

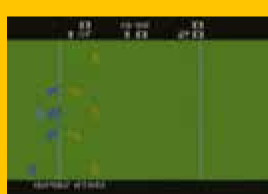


FIVE TO PLAY The best of Rob's back catalogue



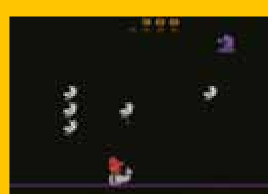
MISSILE COMMAND 1981

■ Rob handled the ports of Dave Theurer's influential coin-op to the Atari 800 and also the 5200 console. Both are commendable efforts, particularly the home computer version which supports Atari's trackball controller, making averting nuclear Armageddon considerably more manageable.



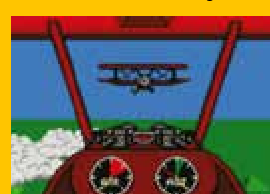
REALSPORTS FOOTBALL 1982

■ Trying to get a half-decent representation of any team sport up and running within the limitations of the 2600 is something of an achievement and Rob deserves credit for producing a fun, if simplified, version of American football – even with some tactical options.



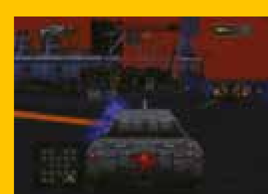
PIGS IN SPACE 1983

■ What sounds like a terribly contrived adaptation of *The Muppets* turns out to be an interesting mashup of three distinct genres. Rob produced the *Space Invaders* pastiche starring Gonzo, which is joined by a sedate take on *River Raid* and a fast *Frogger* clone featuring Miss Piggy. A weird collection, but a good one.



WARBIRDS 1991

■ Rob says this is his finest work and we'd have to agree. A real technical triumph, this offers some thrilling World War 1 dogfights, especially if you connect with other Lynx owners for some local multiplayer battles. One of the handheld's best original games, look out for a Making Of feature coming next year.



BATTLETANX 1998

■ Rob was involved with many big-name franchises towards the end of his career in videogames, and though we did enjoy *Sims 2*, this less-well-known Nintendo 64 title is worth revisiting if you enjoy gigantic explosions and mass carnage. Another game that excels when played with friends. Or enemies.

> “We were the golden boys, the wizards. We were the ones that could make the games”
> Rob Zdybel



» [Lynx] The excellent *Warbirds* for the handheld Lynx console is the game that Rob is most proud of from his storied career.



» [Atari ST] Rob produced a version of the seminal *Star Raiders* for the ST under the Tramiels.

just a static screen. I told my boss that but when she took it upstairs, they were like, ‘We love this! We want this football game!’ I learned a lesson there.

Though you never got 22 players moving on the screen, were you pleased with how the game turned out overall?
I was just trying to be better than the previous football game [Atari had made], which was called ‘*Flying Frog Football*’ around the office because it looked like roadkill was playing the game, the graphics were that bad. That was a pretty easy mark to hit.

It seems the days of you being able to decide what game you made had past and you were being dictated to by the marketing people.
A lot of people left because Marketing pissed them off. I remember proposing a Battle Of Britain game because I love war games and it struck me as a great vehicle. I was shot down by Marketing – no pun intended. Less than two weeks later, Intellivision came out with B-17 Bomber and instantly I’m pulled into a meeting with all these marketing bozos and they want me to do a B-17 airplane game.

That must have been frustrating.
I said, ‘Listen, you guys don’t know anything. If I described a fire truck to you, how shiny and cool it is, you’d tell me no one is going to be interested in it but the minute one goes by with kids chasing it, you’d tell me, “Hey, we just saw a fire truck! Now we understand!” You guys have no goddamn imagination. You can’t see a hit, you can’t see ahead and you have no creativity, so in the future, I’m just going to do whatever I want to do and the hell with what you think.’

Erm, did that go down well with them?
[Laughs] I was not that popular, but they didn’t have any choice. Back in the day, we were the golden boys, the wizards. We were the ones that could make the games and we were cheap. Marketing and management had their fancy offices in a different building, snorting cocaine. That’s no lie. They would just sit around or be off playing golf. It was money for nothing. They knew where the golden goose was – in the building across the street, where the engineers were.



» [Atari 5200] Rob programmed *Missile Command* for the doomed 5200.

Did the marketing people actually interfere with you when you were coding a game?
Let me tell you a story. I was working on the port of *Missile Command* from the coin-op to the Atari 800. Near the end of the project, they assign this marketing guy called Tandy to me and he’d come over every day to bother me. It started off as amusing, then it became tedious and then it got me angry. Finally, I told him to quit bothering me and he said, ‘Hey, I’m just as important as you are to this project.’ I said, ‘Listen Tandy, if I break a finger tomorrow and can’t type, this project stops. On the other hand, if you fall down the stairs and break your neck, things will speed up.’

Did he stop bothering you?
No, he went to my boss, Dennis Koble, and complained bitterly. When he was done with his tirade, Dennis said, ‘Get out, I never want to see you again.’ That’s how we were protected because we were a vast monetary resource and we were cheap. There was no need to antagonise us.

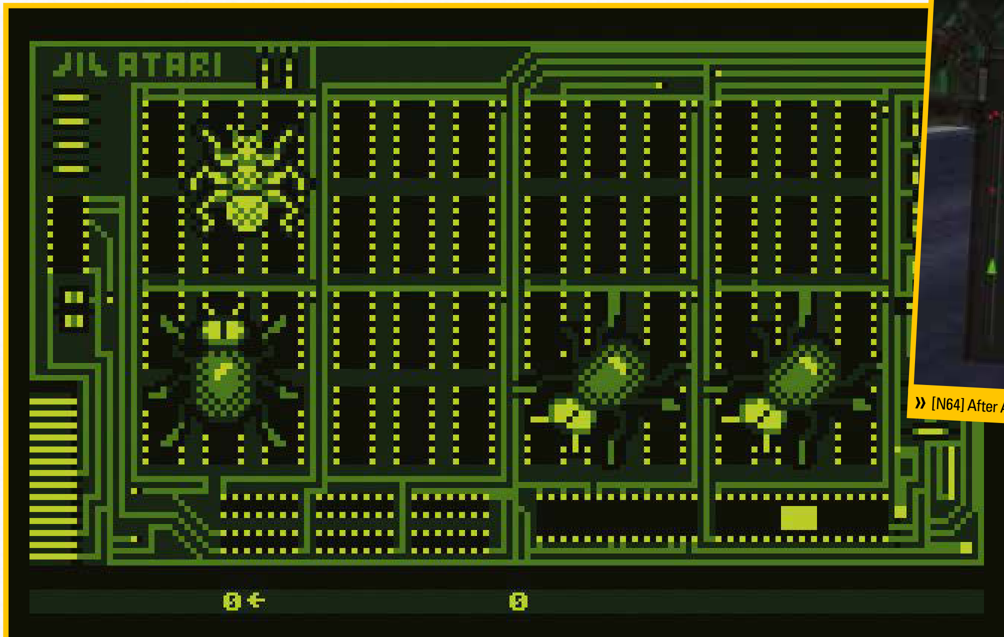
You mentioned programming *Missile Command* for the Atari 5200. What was that machine like to work on?
That console was a dog. The 5200 was a monster project and what a turd came out. It was a terrible idea. Look, we had the 2600 and had the business to ourselves but because Ray Kassar [CEO of Atari] was a very poor businessman, he let the cat out of the bag and allowed four programmers to leave Atari to form Activision. This caused untold trouble to Atari which they could have avoided it.

We agree but how did that affect the 5200?
Behind the 5200 was the Atari 400/800 combo which were supposed to be our new games machines. Unfortunately, around this time Atari got too big for its britches and started hiring all these MBAs and they said, ‘Who wants to play games? We could go head to head with IBM with these machines!’ We could’ve been selling the Atari 400/800 as second-generation games machine in 1980… but instead they wanted to suck the life from the 2600.

So the 5200 was too little, too late.
That whole project was huge cognitive dissonance for me. I’d go to the management and tell them the 5200 was terrible and then I’d have to listen to my programming team telling me the machine was horrible and I’d have to say, ‘Oh come on, it’s not that bad’. That was the worst.

You were still developing for the 2600 in 1983. How happy were you when Marketing asked you to produce a game based on *The Muppets*?
It was near the end of the 2600, Marketing had

In the chair with...



» [Atari 2600] Rob isn't particularly proud of his work on *Bug Hunt*, see the boxout below for the full story.



» [N64] After Atari went bust, Rob joined 3DO and led the *BattleTanx* team.

IT BUGS ME…

Rob on Bug Hunt



"It was the worst project I ever worked on," laughs Rob when we mention *Bug Hunt*, his collaboration with artist Alan Murphy. "I was told Atari desperately needed a game done in six weeks to bundle it with a lightgun. I said, 'You can't do that. I've seen it attempted – let's talk *E.T.*!' I told them they were insane but agreed to it on the condition that they'd never ask me to do a sequel or a remake because I knew it was going to stink on ice." Rob and Alan duly cranked out the simple target shooting game to the tight deadline and even put their names on the title screen in big letters. "I knew the company policy was never to credit programmers but it gave them something to reject. You have to give management something to piss on in any project. But they kept it in! The only game with my name on the title screen is the worst game I've ever made."

taken over, we were being screwed six ways to Sunday and everyone is kind of unhappy to still be working on this machine that should've been put to bed years ago. But it's a living. This was what I call 'New Atari', when it's not engineers who decide what to make but Marketing telling you, 'We need a game with Miss Piggy in it.'

You must have hated having to work on *Pigs In Space Starring Miss Piggy* then?

It's actually one of my favourite projects! It was a nice collaboration with two other programmers and we each did a level. I did the *Space Invaders* one where you fire sausages at chickens. And the licensee people were really fun. They showered us with toys and gifts and were wonderful to work with. In fact, the only problem they had with our game was that Big Bird wasn't the right yellow. Hey, on the 2600, you had six colours and black. It was the only yellow we had!

Around this time, Atari starts to implode. Did you sense the end was nigh?

I divide Atari into three eras. There's 'Old Atari', which is the one I joined. Then there's 'New Atari', when managers and executives took over, who decided they knew how best to run things, especially with a good nose of cocaine. Things went to hell under them because they didn't know what they were doing, they had no vision for new software and they were undermining the company for their own profit. These guys poured millions into appointing their offices so lavishly, they even had gold toilet fixtures. I remember being invited to a management dinner along with 2,000 people. I mean, we only had 4,000 employees in total worldwide.

Hang on, had you become part of the management, Rob?

I had by then, but I didn't manage. I told the programmers, 'I don't give a shit how you get your work done, I don't care if you get little men to come in the middle of the night to spin your straw into gold, just do your job. Okay, I'm done. Off you go'. They were the kind of people who you could manage in that kind of way. The company was being supported by the engineers in my building and those who were working on coin-ops. The rest of these people were detritus. It was a breath of fresh air when the Tramiels took over. I was actually quite happy.

Did you think of leaving Atari as it crashed around you?

I could have got a job elsewhere but you could tell the Tramiels had their heads screwed on. They slashed the overheads and they kept the engineers that knew what they were doing and tossed the rest. 'Tramiel Atari' was a good place, man. If you made money for them and showed you were competent, they liked you and treated you like family. The Tramiels were pretty nice.

You stayed and did a version of the famous game *Star Raiders* for the Atari ST and a lightgun game called *Bug Hunt* and then you got to work with Atari's handheld, the Lynx.

It was first known as the Handy from Epyx Games and Tramiel had done some deal that left them unhappy, which his deals frequently did. I'd seen it when it was a bread board, roughly a metre square of plywood, and had been using it for a while. The architect was Dave Needle and he's a genius. He claims he's from Jupiter and it's probably true. Beautiful design and one of the nicest pieces of hardware I've ever worked on.

You coded *Warbirds* for the Lynx, a very impressive World War 1 air combat game.

For that, I used rotating sprites and scaling and it works really well. I studied how planes fly and I really learned about flight simulation. I even got compliments from small plane pilots… it was a game I wanted to play, and it's my best work by far.

You work with more new hardware when Atari develop the Jaguar in the early Nineties.

I was the first programmer to ever touch Jaguar hardware. I was charged with getting the GPU [graphics processor unit] to work and that was a nightmare. It would just silently go off the rails. It was a real challenge to your debugging skills to find out what had gone wrong with hardware which according to the designers should work. But I liked it. I got to know

what it could do and it was a neat machine. I'd never worked with a blitter system before and it was fast and fun. Look at what Jeff Minter did with it – all sorts of colourful, splashy things.

Is the commercial failure of the Jaguar what prompted you to finally leave Atari?
I didn't leave Atari, Atari left me, man! It went bankrupt. I'd been working from home for years by then. I got a call from my boss saying my final cheque was in the post. I'd been waiting for them to go tits up for a while. It was kind of inevitable.

You had various jobs at places such as Irrational Games and Mindscape before ending up at 3DO.
That was a lot of fun at first, when it was just Trip [Hawkins – founder of 3DO] and the engineers. We did *Battletanx* which was a real success. You know you got a good game when the team want to play it. Then Trip started hiring these clowns, lots of his old cronies from EA who were filthy rich. I told him, 'You need to hire people with fire in their bellies, people who care. These people spend all day checking their EA stock!' I got fed up with that and left.

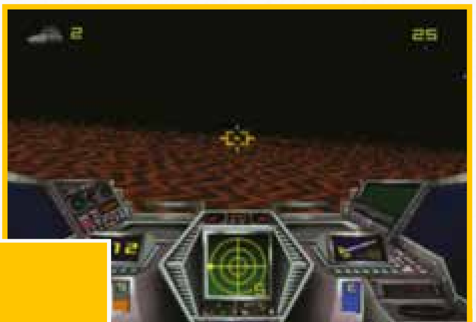
In the Noughties you work on some pretty big franchises like *The Sims 2*.
Do you remember 'EA spouse'? All those stories complaining about the really long hours? I was brought in to that team to replace one of the biggest bastards and they all expected me to be like him. I remember going round late one night telling one of my top performers to go home and he said, 'You're just saying that – you don't really want me to go home.' They'd been abused for so long and so badly the paranoia was deep.

Was *The Simpsons Game* (released in 2007) a better experience?
No, that was a terrible project. No one was playing the game [in development], they were just doing their bit. No one was excited about it at all. It was such a dead project. You knew it was going to be a turd while it was being made.

Erm, how about *Spider-Man: Web of Shadows* in 2008, was that more of the same?
It was a nightmare but I just needed the money. Listen, I had a daughter to put through college. I was really fed up with the games business by then.

So was that your final game?
Well, I worked with some really good people at Innovative Leisure after that, old Atari people like Ed Rotberg and Owen Rubin. That was a good way to end my career. It was cake and ice cream again… a bunch of engineers making up games, thinking of ideas, coming up with features and implementing them. It was a real pity none of the games came out.

Didn't you get screwed by management again, just like the old days?
Yeah, but at least the management that fucked us were all our friends! *



» [Jaguar] *Hover Strike* hinted at the potential of the Jaguar, particularly the CD.

> I could have got a job elsewhere but you could tell the Tramiels had their heads screwed on
>
> Rob Zdybel



YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

Where you chair a private rooftop Q&A with Rob

PARANOID MARVIN: Was any thought given to having *Realsports Football* endorsed by a famous player or club?

I wouldn't know but I wish they had because it would have sold a lot more copies! Like the *Pele Soccer* game for the 2600 was very mediocre but it sold a hell of lot of copies.

NORTHWAY: When did you feel that arcades were losing the technical advantage over the home products?

You know, I never think they did. Atari coin-op always had better tech that we did. Always. They would get the latest generation custom hardware for their shit. We could only have what was cast in silicon years before. I still think you can have a better experience in the arcade – they have hydraulics and all kinds of stuff we didn't have.

MIQROJAMIE: What was the most defining moment of your time as a developer?

Someone asked Frank Zappa to describe the kind of music he made and he said, 'I make music that I might want to hear'. That's the essence of good design and it's my whole philosophy of game design. I make games that I want to play.

THE LAIRD: *Hover Strike CD* has an impressive 3D engine on the Jaguar. Do you think you could have pushed the hardware further?

Yes. Empirically that's definitely true. In my experience as a developer, you can always get more out of the hardware. It can almost be miraculous.


NORMAL
×04



Kirby & The Amazing Mirror

FOUR BLOBS ARE BETTER THAN ONE

» RETROREVIVAL

» GAME BOY ADVANCE » 2004
» FLAGSHIP, DIMPS, HAL LABORATORY

Many of my friends dismiss *Kirby* games as 'for kids' or because 'they all play the same'. Yeah, I know: I clearly need to get some better friends.

The real truth of the matter here is that Kirby is a surprisingly versatile little fella, and when he's not simply sucking up his foes and absorbing their abilities, his platform-based antics have been suitably enhanced by all manner of cool minigames. We're not focusing on those games here, though. Instead, we're going to discuss that one time when Kirby met Dark Meta Knight and got split into four separate Kirbys. You must remember it, right? They built a whole game around it. Okay, so it's a rubbish plotline, but it did allow Flagship (which developed the game with additional support from Dimps and HAL Laboratory) to create one of the most interesting releases in the Kirby franchise.

As with *Four Swords Adventures* - which was available on the GameCube around the same time – *Amazing Mirror* is geared toward multiplayer fun and sees you and up to three friends attempting to navigate a number of surprisingly labyrinth-like levels, which immediately sets it apart from the typically linear stages of other *Kirby* titles. Playing as four Kirbys makes for a great spin on his traditional outings and as a result it's far puzzlier than other games in the series. It's also backed up by some equally entertaining minigames that also come to life when played with other players.

It's worth noting that *Amazing Mirror* does lose a little of its magic when played by yourself as the computer AI obviously isn't on par with playing with another human – Kirby can use his mobile to summon the other Kirbys when you need help – but it's still perfectly engaging and there's something strangely satisfying seeing four brightly-coloured Kirbys unleashing hell on everyone around them. *



>> This month we go hands on with the SNES Mini. We also check out Metroid: Samus Returns and play the latest game in the Ys series

Nintendo Classic Mini: SNES

PROOF THAT GREAT THINGS COME IN SMALL PACKAGES

INFORMATION

» **RELEASED:** OUT NOW

» **PRICE:** £69.99

» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO

» **PLAYERS:** 1-2



It's perhaps the nature of today's gamers that the SNES Mini isn't even out as we write this, but everyone is already looking forward to next year's speculation-fuelled N64 Mini. The SNES Mini is here right now, though, so let's take a look and see if the final product is worth it.

The most obvious thing about Nintendo's new system is that it's a good £20 more expensive than last year's NES Mini. It also has far fewer games, clocking in 21 instead of the 30 found on the NES Mini system. Of course, it helps that the included games are some of the finest from their generation, but it will nevertheless gall those who instantly start comparing Nintendo's officially licensed product to a Raspberry Pi machine. The other bigger difference over last year's NES model is that the SNES Mini now comes packed with a second pad, as well as far longer leads. The new lead length still isn't perfect, but it's a huge improvement over last year's model and shows that Nintendo does listen to feedback when it's given.

Another difference over the NES Mini is that Nintendo has done some cool little things to make the overall presentation even better than before. As with the NES Mini you have, 4:3, Pixel Perfect and CRT options, but it's now possible to add different borders, including a nifty speaker setup. There are still four save states per game (handy when you consider the great RPGS available) but you can also utilise a highly useful rewind feature if you want to perfect clearing a game. It's not quite as easy to use as the function found in *Rare Replay*, but it remains a useful feature.

As is often the case with any collection like this it's the games that are the true stars, and they rarely disappoint. As it did with the NES Mini, Nintendo has contacted a selection of past third-party developers to ensure a fantastic mixture of games. Square Enix supplies *Secret Of Mana*, *Super Mario RPG* and *Final Fantasy III* (or *FFVI* as it's better known), *Mega Man X*, *Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting* and *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* appear



» [SNES Mini] Sam has been using the new rewind feature to try and beat Darran's score challenge this month.



BRIEF HISTORY

» The original Super Famicom was released in 1990 alongside *Super Mario World* and *F-Zero*. Despite early dominance from Sega in the form of its Mega Drive, Nintendo's more powerful system eventually won the console war, selling over 49 million consoles in the process. This is the second system to become part of Nintendo's new Classic Mini brand after last year's release of the NES Mini.

PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN

Metroid: Samus Returns

It certainly has its issues, but Samus' latest adventure is a solid return to form after the disappointment of *Federation Force*. *Metroid* is most definitely back.



NICK

Puyo Puyo Tetris

It was all going so well, I was four weeks clean. Then Sega released the balance patch. Curses!



» [SNES Mini] The CRT filter looks rather quaint and does a great job of emulating the TVs of old.



courtesy of Capcom, while Konami's submissions are the excellent *Contra III: Alien Wars* and *Super Castlevania IV*. Nintendo's lineup otherwise dominates the SNES Mini and with the exception of *Kirby's Dream Course* it's a dazzling array of games. While it's rather odd the launch game *Pilot Wings* doesn't make an appearance, it's hard to moan at what has been included. *Earthbound* is a particular highlight, as its late release meant many missed out on it on its original release. It's also nice to see the proper version of *Yoshi's Island* as previous Virtual Console releases has always saw Nintendo focusing on the GBA version of the game.

The jewel of the crown is easily *Star Fox 2*, which has never been released until now. Nintendo has polished it up, sorted out all the emulation issues (something which was a sticking point in the past with regards to its ever resurfacing) and the results are tremendous. Yes it's certainly showing its age (alongside *Star Fox*, it's reliance on polygons is a crutch that can't be ignored) but the Nintendo magic is clearly there to see and it's a far more expansive game that the original *Star Fox* due to the way it's been structured. It is more strategy-orientated than *Star Fox* and it's obvious that *Star Fox Command* on the DS owes a huge amount to it. The new chicken walker craft isn't as accessible as we'd like, but it's an otherwise small blip in a solid blaster. It's easy to knock Nintendo, but releasing *Star Fox 2* is going beyond the call of duty and reminds us of when Sega finally released an English version of *Monster World IV* after an 18-year delay.

Build-wise the SNES Mini is rather delightful. While having to pull off a plastic guard to plug in the joysticks is a little messy, it's a necessary evil and doesn't really take away from the overall build quality, which is excellent. It's reassuringly heavy to hold, feels extremely well built and looks absolutely gorgeous. As with the NES Mini it comes with a HDMI lead, as well as a USB lead which is used to power the system (we plugged it directly into our TV).

The SNES Mini is another marvellous addition to Nintendo's new line of plug-and-play systems, but it's still far from perfect. The mix of genres will frustrate as much as it delights, while the inability to download new games via the Virtual Console still feels like a missed opportunity. It wouldn't have hurt to add a few more games as well, particularly when the likes of *Pilot Wings* and *Super Mario All-Stars* are painfully absent, but it's certainly not a deal-breaker when you consider what physical copies of the included games would cost. ★

In a nutshell

The lack of variety is a bit disappointing but Nintendo's system still manages to collate some of the best games from the 16-bit era in one desirable package. Roll on the Nintendo 64 Mini!



» [SNES Mini] The first-person viewpoint takes a little while to get used to, but it works quite well.

★ MINIATURE MARVELS

Contra III: The Alien Wars
★★★★★

Donkey Kong Country
★★★★☆

EarthBound
★★★★★

Final Fantasy III
★★★★★

F-Zero
★★★★☆

Kirby Super Star
★★★★☆

Kirby's Dream Course
★★☆☆☆

The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past
★★★★★

Mega Man X
★★★☆☆

Secret of Mana
★★★★☆

Star Fox
★★★☆☆

Star Fox 2
★★★★☆

Street Fighter II Turbo
★★★★★

Super Castlevania IV
★★★★★

Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
★★★★☆

Super Mario Kart
★★★★★

Super Mario RPG
★★★☆☆

Super Mario World
★★★★★

Super Metroid
★★★★★

Super Punch-Out!!
★★★★☆

Yoshi's Island
★★★★★



PICK OF THE MONTH

Metroid: Samus Returns

» **System:** 3DS » **Buy it for:** £34.99 (£59.99 LE) » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

After tackling the *Castlevania* franchise with varying degrees of success, Mercurysteam have now been handed the keys to the *Metroid* kingdom. It's a good fit for both parties and almost makes us forget about the huge disappointment that was *Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow II*. Almost…

While *Samus Returns* is not a direct level-for-level remake of the first portable *Metroid* game it shares enough of its DNA that many of its areas will be familiar to fans of Samus' second adventure. It's still about dealing with the mass genocide of the Metroids (you have 40 progressively tougher variants to track down and wipe out) and is just as heavily combat-orientated, but exploration (which is always a key facet of *Metroid* games) also has an important role to play.

This is most obvious with the introduction of the Scan Pulse, one of four new Aeion abilities, which lets you send out a pulse revealing nearby secrets and pathways. Later abilities give Samus enhanced armour, increased firepower and also the ability to slow time, and all are charged based, meaning you'll need to regain energy by destroying enemies and picking up any orbs they leave behind. While the enemies are far tougher than in past games, Samus herself is no pushover, having access to a powerful counterattack that allows her to make mincemeat of most enemies. Providing she can get the timing right… Samus also has access to Free Aim, which allows her full 360-degree shooting giving her absolute mastery over her weaponry.

These combat skills are a boon, but they do have drawbacks. The developers appear to want you to use the counterattack constantly, which often puts Samus in situations where it's hard to avoid damage. Some of the boss battles can be a bit of a slog, too, particularly when you've battled the same Metroid variant several times. These issues never overwhelm the adventure though (which clocks in at over ten hours) and they integrate well with the deep exploration that *Samus Returns* offers. After the misstep that was Federation Force this is a welcome return to form.

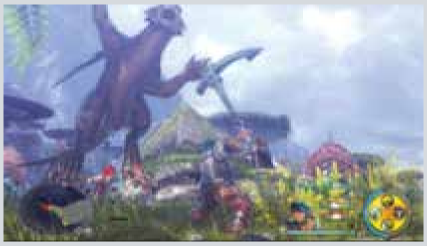
>> Score **81%**



» [3DS]Key upgrades like the Grapple Beam eventually unlock, enabling you to fully explore the creepy looking caverns.



» [3DS] There are a pleasing variety of enemies to face in *Samus Returns*, with many requiring all sorts of tactics and different weaponry to defeat.



Ys VIII: Lacrimosa Of Dana

» **System:** PS Vita (tested), PS4, PC » **Buy it for:** £39.99
» **Buy it from:** Retail, Online

Adventurer-for-hire Adol Christin isn't having the best of luck. After taking work on a ship, he's stranded on a desert island with all the other ship's residents and must find a way to escape. While the premise and storyline are weak for a *Ys* game, *Lacrimosa Of Dana*, is no less entertaining. Exploring the island and rescuing survivors not only allows Adol to recruit new members to his group, but also lets you build a village and slowly expand it, which in turn rewards Adol and his team with new items and weapons. The action is also solid with a variety of skills to unlock and plenty of bosses to use them against. Although many of the characters are clichés, the island's intriguing mystery more than makes up for it.

>> Score **80%**



Windjammers

» **System:** PS4 (Tested), PS Vita » **Buy it for:** £11.99
» **Buy it from:** PSN

We've always had a fondness for Data East's pseudo-sport classic, which takes a tennis-style game played with Frisbees and adds six characters with their own strengths and special moves. DotEmu has brought it over to the PS4 pretty well – the game is the original running under emulation, with a custom front-end that offers easy access to minigames, difficulty settings, a CRT filter and other such modern conveniences. *Windjammers* has always been a great multiplayer game and that remains true here, so long as you're playing locally. We had problems with latency online, but the bigger problem was stability, with crashes frequently occurring. Still, this is a game you should really be playing on the couch with a friend anyway.

>> Score **84%**



Matterfall

» **System:** PS4 » **Buy it for:** £15.99
» **Buy it from:** PSN

If you needed further proof of Eugene Jarvis' influence on the incredible *Nex Machina*, just play a few games of *Matterfall*. Housemarque's latest shooter isn't terrible, but it's also leagues behind the hyperkinetic thrill ride of the team's last game. The mixture of platforming and shooting is handled nicely, but your hero, Avalon Darrow (great name), never feels as precise to control as the protagonist of *Nex Machina*. As with the company's last game, dashing is a key component and becomes critical on later stages, but the waves of enemies you tackle are nowhere near as exciting to face. The scoring system is solid, offering plenty of replay value, but it lacks the excitement and sheer adrenaline rush that *Nex Machina* offers.

>> Score **68%**

» [Web] Do you ever get that feeling you're being followed?





» [Web] After taking the fight to the streets, it moves to a subway train.



» [Web] Life is, as the late Sir Brucie used to sing, the name of the game.

Gaming NEWS

MORE TINY PACKAGES

There have been a startling number of good game jams over the last couple of months and the latest on our radar was the LowRezJam, a competition for current-generation machines, but with an important stipulation: everything has to happen in 64x64 pixels and, for reference, the Sinclair Spectrum has 12 times that resolution. Despite a relatively short development period there were over two hundred entries so we've picked a few that grabbed our attention.

We were drawn to *Gauntless* because it's a version of arcade classic *Gauntlet* but in miniature – everything has been simplified, but the core gameplay of exploring dungeons, shooting the inhabitants and picking up valuable items or keys is there. *64 Fists* also owes a debt to Eighties games, in particular classic scrolling beat-'em-ups like *Double Dragon* so the player will get to duff up groups of similar-looking enemies in quite familiar but pixelated surroundings, such as on the streets, in dingy alleyways and aboard a moving subway train. Also inspired by an arcade game is *Clamp 64* which takes ideas from *Qix* and *Volfied* but adds new features while expanding the playfield out; the core system of boxing in enemies remains, although the rules seem to have been loosened up a little to allow for the scrolling.

Fans of puzzle games have a few options as well and we enjoyed trying out *Trisk*, a match-three style game where the tiles slowly scroll upwards. The player can exchange two tiles horizontally without penalty – so the playfield can be shuffled around at will – but not swap them vertically. Another brain bender is *Pixel Puzzler* where a blue ball has to be manoeuvred to an exit portal with the caveat being that it won't stop once the player has set it in motion – the environment must therefore be used to line the blob up with its destination.

Finally there's *Life*, a simplified version of 'life simulator' games, like Activision's *Alter Ego*, where the player's character is flung into a hostile world and must make difficult choices as they mature. It's an interesting experience with the outcomes being pretty dark and a central message dished out after death about being more tolerant and compassionate to each other. Overall, the entries cover a wide range of genres including RPGs, 2D and 3D driving, shoot-'em-ups and platformers. Kikstart.eu/lowrez-2017 will take you there.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at: **darran.jones@futurenet.com**



» [Amstrad CPC] Facing off against the fearsome Trojan Bunny

SPOOKY GOINGS ON

We covered Keith Sear's first *Chibi Akumas* game for the Amstrad CPC in issue 165 and enjoyed the colourful, bullet-laden experience. He has recently announced that there's a sequel on the way and *Chibi Akumas Episode 2: Confrontation* looks to be continuing the barrage of bullets where its predecessor left off.

Several new features have been added and things like animation, sprite size and movement patterns are improved. Kikstart.eu/chibi-cpc goes to the official website for more details and Keith has told us that he's rather appropriately planning for a Halloween release.

> "Creating a game for the CPC has been a goal of the developer since childhood"



» [Amstrad CPC] A large, fruity treat awaits anybody who gets past the nasties.

RUN FOR IT

Try To Run Away is a reasonably simple, but colourful, platformer for the Amstrad CPC, which is currently being developed by Lws Soft. According to the CPC Wiki forum announcement thread – have a look behind Kikstart.eu/ttra-thread-cpc – creating a game for the Amstrad CPC has been a goal of the developer since childhood and, courtesy of Arcade Game Designer, that itch is well on its way to being scratched.

The current beta – assuming it hasn't already been completed when this goes out – is downloadable from the developer's website at Kikstart.eu/ttra-cpc.

HOMEBREW HEROES

Darren Coles is the person behind the recently released BBC Micro conversion of Trailblazer we looked at last issue. He was moving very fast indeed, but we managed to catch up with him for a chat



THE BIG INTERVIEW Darren Coles

To begin with, why did you decide on converting *Trailblazer* to the BBC?

I was looking for a project to take on and I wanted to have a go at writing a full game from scratch. Most of the things I've done before have involved lots of reverse engineering and modifying existing code. I first learned to program on the Acorn Electron in the Eighties so I originally planned to do something on that but I then decided it would be better to switch to the BBC.

My graphic skills are pretty much non-existent so I had to find someone willing to help with the graphics or find a game that I could do without needing assistance. I thought about it for some time and *Trailblazer* came to mind as a game I used to play on the Spectrum that seemed to fit my requirements perfectly.

Did you disassemble any of the existing versions?

I wrote the whole thing from scratch. I used the Spectrum version as a visual reference and used some level maps I found online to create the level data. I wrote a tool on the PC to analyse the map graphics and create the level data for me automatically. The score panel was taken directly from the Spectrum version and tweaked to fit the BBC low-resolution screen mode.



» [BBC Micro] Leaping majestically over chasms in the trail, for the moment at least.

And, roughly, how long did the process take you from start to finish?

I ended up working on this mainly during my spare time in the evenings and I started prototyping about four months ago. I started by creating the ball animation and then built the main level scrolling routines. I started by updating the grid line by line on the screen, but it was way too slow so I switched to a timer based palette switching routine which allowed me to get it running at 50fps. After that, I added the ball movement routines.

Once the basic game mechanics were in place I added the scoring, level select and main menu. The final few weeks was polishing, bug fixing and tweaking of the speed, gravity and jump constants to get the gameplay as close to the Spectrum version as possible.

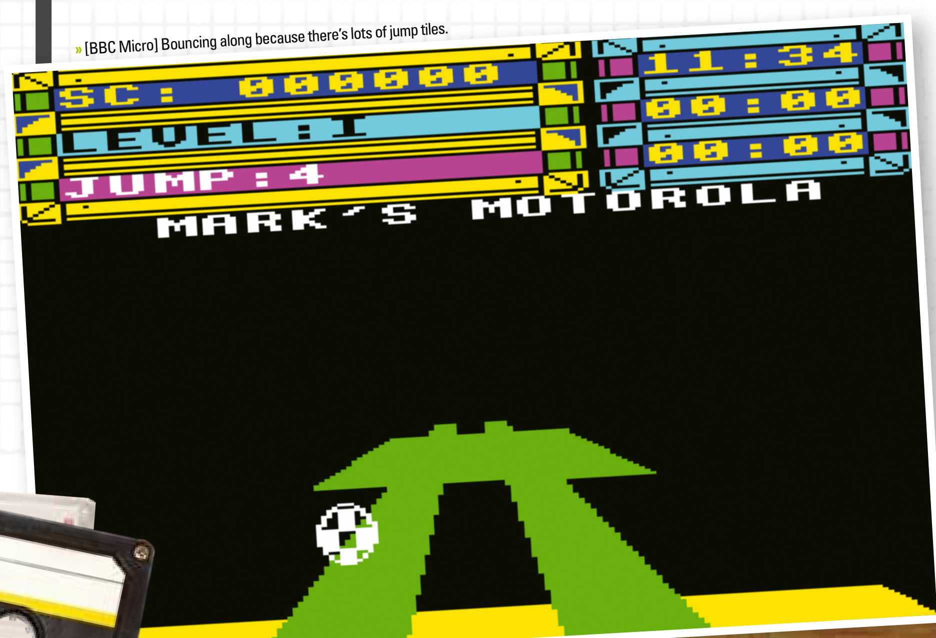
In hindsight, is there anything you would have done differently?

I delivered a decent conversion, am happy with the results and I enjoyed working on the project. I would have liked to put a title page on the front and possibly improved the sound effects (or added some music for an enhanced BBC Master version).

What has the response from BBC Micro community been like?

I had a great response on Facebook and on the Star-dot forums. There were lots of replies saying how smooth it was. A couple of people reported a bug with the sound within days of me releasing it. This turned out to be a timing issue that meant the sound didn't work correctly on the real machine but worked without issue on the emulators. This was fixed pretty quickly.

» [BBC Micro] Bouncing along because there's lots of jump tiles.



Gaming

REVIEWS

DO YOU REMEMBER?

It's time to get your motor running, because *Motormania* is a race against the clock – man and machine speeding along while trying to stay on the road as it weaves in all directions. The only objective in each area is reaching the finish line and, while the stages themselves are pretty short, having too many crashes along the way will eat through precious seconds to make completing them impossible.

This is a partial conversion of *Power Drift* from the C64, taking background graphics and the road drawing routine to make a simpler, but enjoyable, racer. There aren't opponents to worry about and the challenge comes from the strict time limit and, when at full speed, the road rapidly twisting and turning as you try to beat the clock. Drive on over to Kikstart.eu/motormania-264.

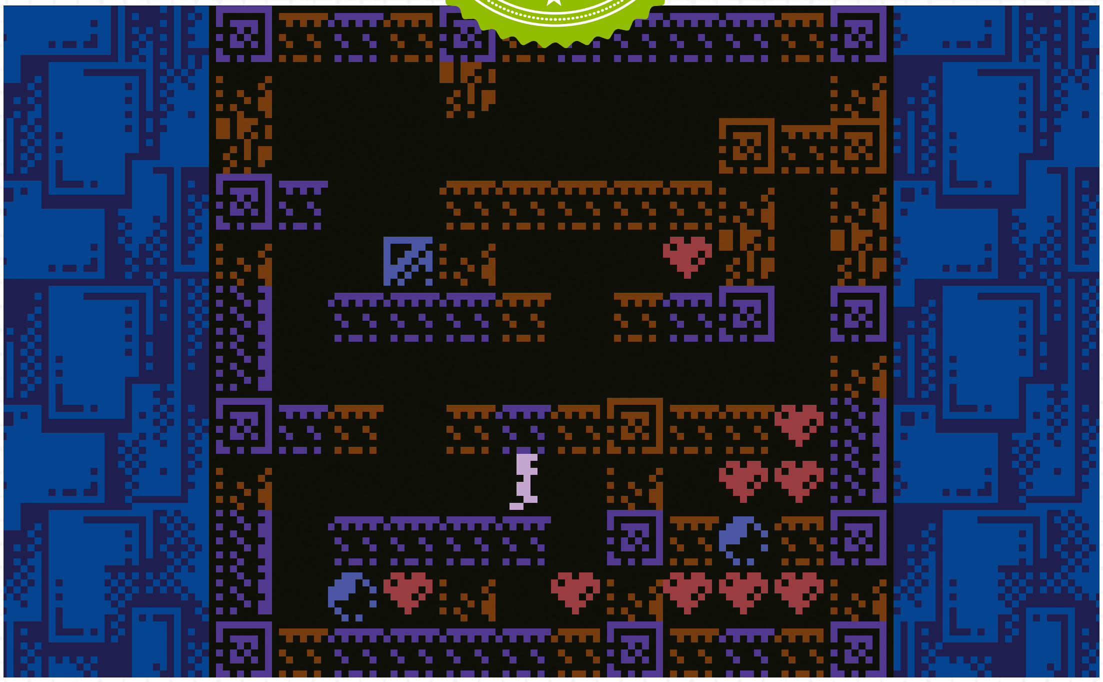


» [Plus/4] The thrill of the open road and the wind in your… helmet?



» [Plus/4] Racing through a construction site, that doesn't seem entirely safe!





» [Atari 8-bit] Jumping down onto the heart and rotating the world leaves it ready to collect.

TRZASKOWSKI'S TENSOR

» **FORMAT:** ATARI 8-BIT » **DEVELOPER:** RAFAL CHABOWSKI » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/TENSOR-A8 » **PRICE:** FREE

Hidden deep within the caves of Jupiter are the fabled and rather mysterious 'X4 Almonds' which, if the rumours are to be believed, contain incredible powers. Quite what these ancient artefacts – which resemble hearts, chalices, devil heads and other strange objects which wouldn't usually be found within the caverns of a remote alien world – are capable of is a mystery, but our protagonist, Mr Trzaskowski, is, as a scientist, the right person to find out. And, assuming he can collect enough examples for his experiments, that's precisely what he intends to do. But the good doctor's problem is that he can only collect objects by moving horizontally towards them so standing on something or having it balancing on his head means it can't be picked up.

Matters aren't helped by the fact that he can't jump either, so if a glittering prize is just out of reach what is he to do? That's where the Tensor comes in, it's one of Trzaskowski's brilliant inventions which can adjust gravity – holding the fire button down and pushing left or right rotates the cavern ninety degrees anti-clockwise or clockwise respectively, forcing everything that isn't nailed down to tumble to the bottom of the play area including our hero. Fortunately, he won't be killed by crates, boulders or collectible items falling on his bonce, although it's quite easy to become quite deeply buried under said objects on the later levels.

Trzaskowski's Tensor was the winner of the game competition at the Polish demoscene party Ironia in August. The idea is simple, but effective, and it should probably be viewed as a 'casual' game since the developers didn't include a lives counter or timer and, once a stage has been reached during play, it can then be accessed from the title page until the power is turned off. The downside is that, although the levels themselves are fun to play, there aren't really enough of them for a long term challenge so we'd like to see a sequel with more stages and perhaps improved in-game graphics.

» **Score 82%**



» [Atari 8-bit] An impossible-to-escape box, but perhaps guiding the chalice over will help?



» [Atari 8-bit] The weight of the world balancing on his shoulders and objects on his head.

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RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag darran.jones@futurenet.com



CROSS CHASE

» **FORMAT:** VARIOUS » **PRICE:** FREE
» **DEVELOPER:** FABRIZIO CARUSO
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/CROSS-CHASE-VARIOUS



» [C16] Demons in a line, but not all of them are heading for the trap.

***Cross Chase* is a very simple game; the player's avatar is pursued by demon faces which must be guided into traps and the current level is complete when all of these enemies are disposed of.** But as the game progresses there are different nasties added to the playfield which get in the way of this process and, if too long is taken, another enemy appears which can simply walk through everything as it pursues the player. There is the occasional gun power-up which can be used in retaliation, though, and a second item which slows enemies down to make the herding process easier.

It already runs on a range of machines and the developer has plans to port it even further, so *Cross Chase* is an ongoing project, but the VIC version we've been playing seems to be about as complete as it can get and offers some entertaining, no-nonsense action.

>> Score **78%**



» [VIC 20] A reasonably successful attempt to herd some of the enemies.

BOMB RUNNER 2

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE PLUS/4 » **DEVELOPER:** ROLAND KUNZ
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/BOMB-RUNNER-2-264 » **PRICE:** FREE

Each area of *Bomb Runner 2* contains an explosive device which has a timer with mere seconds left before it explodes; these devices need to be defused, but the maze-like corridors around each one are being guarded. The player must first reach the bomb before it explodes and then make their way to the exit, all the time avoiding beams of light coming from torches on the way. Guards don't move but will change the direction they're looking regularly.

The title might hint at a *Bomberman*-style action game but, while *Bomb Runner 2* requires good timing and reflexes to weave between the pools of torchlight, there's a lot of strategy involved. The gameplay is solid, if rather unforgiving, on the default difficulty setting and there's very little time to pause and think at the start of each stage so some trial and error is required to discover the safe route.

>> Score **82%**

» [Plus/4] Sitting in a safe spot, waiting for the guards to turn around.



ROUNDUP

There are two reworked versions of *Jet Set Willy* recently released for the Spectrum; the first is *Jet Set Mixup* – which can be found behind Kikstart.eu/js-mixup-spec where all of the regular enemies have all decided to take a vacation so they've been replaced by sprites from the likes of *Jet Set Willy II* and *Manic Miner.*

The second remix is *Jet Set Mini* which again retains the familiar map but literally turns it around, mirroring the classic rooms so everything is on the opposite side of the screen. There are a few other alterations, as well including extra enemies, and this particular one can be found at Kikstart.eu/js-mini-spec.

In both cases the core game that *JSW* fans know and love is still in place, but with enough tweaks and twists to make it feel different.

THAT SINKING FEELING

» **FORMAT:** ZX SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** SUNTEAM AND BUM FUN GAMING
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/SINKING-FEELING-SPEC » **PRICE:** FREE

The planet Atlantis was ravaged by war some three years ago and many of its underwater cities are still in ruins. As is usually the way, rumours of hidden treasures just waiting to be scavenged have been circulating through the galaxies for a while so Lady Mandrill sends one of her best agents out; this is why Spectra's ship is currently in orbit around Atlantis and her submersible vehicle has just descended beneath the waves.

Spectra's mission takes place in a flip-screen environment with huge, sub-destroying sea creatures patrolling the narrow passageways and static hazards like electrified pipes which still carry a charge that can crash the sub's onboard computer. Gravity is another factor to consider because it's always pulling the craft downwards and the pilot needs to allow for that when navigating the tougher screens, so collecting all ten of the treasure chests is a challenging task.

>> Score **84%**



» [ZX Spectrum] Passing through narrow gaps in the electric pipes is some heart-stopping stuff.



» [ZX Spectrum] Carefully weaving through the underwater hazards in search of loot.

MAILBAG

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WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of either our NES/Master System or SNES/Mega Drive books





» Do original, non-Mega Drive games have a place on this device? Many would argue that they don't.

BEAT THE TEAM

SUPER GHOULS 'N GHOSTS



We received a SNES Mini in the office, so we picked the most frustrating game on the console for a high score challenge, each team member hoping the others would just quit...



NICK **629,200**

"Watch everyone else to get a handle on the best strategies and common mistakes. Play less than everyone else, so you have an excuse for failing to claim victory. Then win anyway."



DARRAN **204,700**

"We could have all simply farmed the first level like Nick did, but the rest of the team were more interested in getting as far as they could"



SAM **144,400**

"I'm going to put my rather average score down to Darran's dirty tactic of removing the SNES Mini from the office. He clearly sensed his score was under threat."



DREW **100,500**

"Here's some things I found that were less painful than playing *G'NG*: rolling in fire, licking icy poles, jumping on a bear, staring at the sun... I could go on."

LESS IS MORE

Hi **RG**,
It was interesting to read the interview with the person behind the latest release of the plug-and-play Sega Genesis and Atari Flashback 8, especially regarding correcting the problems that have been ongoing in terms of its poor emulations and sound quality.

But whilst the Atari series has been faithful at times in terms of having a good roster of games, it's the Sega series that still causes me to wince. Whenever one of these plug-and-play consoles arrives, despite its lovely retro packaging reminiscent of the Nineties, it's the total number of games that is misleading. I mean 80 games, but only 40 of them are the real deal? The other 40 look like they are knock-off games and were included just to plug the gap.

It would have been nice if the people of AtGames and Sega and Atari would ask consumers what games they would like to see included on these plug-and-play consoles. I bet a number would say they would like to see *Strider*, *Cannon Fodder*, *G-Loc* and *Chaos Engine* to name but a few appear on them, as opposed to a number of the same games being included on each different AtGames plug-and-play release.

Cisko Kidd

You're certainly not the only person that feels that the inclusion of non-Mega Drive games is actually a negative – lots of people seem to feel that it somehow cheapens the package. This was a point we raised during the interview, but while AtGames' representative acknowledged that perception, she couldn't say much else about it. As for including the games you mention, all apart from *G-Loc* would involve setting up licensing deals. This is possible but expensive, and AtGames already has to pay for the Sega games that are included in its systems – a problem Nintendo doesn't have with the Nintendo Classic Mini range, since it owns the games outright. As the AtGames Mega Drive consoles include cartridge slots, we don't think it's that big of a deal – people can get those games if they want them.

RETRO REELS

Hi **RG**,
I enjoyed your recent cover story on the 'King of Kong'. I can still recall how excited I was to learn

STAR LETTER

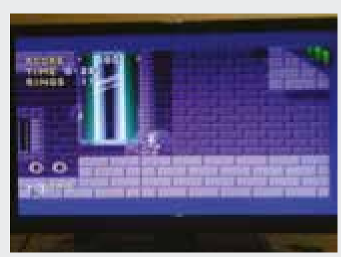
BEWARE THE SNOB

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I'm a snob. I didn't mean to become a snob and I'm not pleased that I have, but when it comes to retro games, I constantly find myself looking down at other people for the way in which they enjoy their hobby. I realised this when a friend starting posting pictures of his SNES on Facebook. Other people were reminiscing about how much they loved *Mario Kart*. I was fighting the urge to tell him that the image from his PAL console, delivered over composite AV cables and stretched across a widescreen HDTV, was a total abomination.

In the past, I've been quick to tell people online what's wrong with their retro setups, but I held my tongue this time so as to avoid upsetting my friend. But maybe it's him that has it right, anyway? He doesn't faff about with getting RGB SCART cables for everything, he doesn't pay through the nose for mods and he doesn't annoy his wife by keeping a massive CRT telly. He just puts on some games and enjoys them like he did 25 years ago, and spends less money and setup time doing so – and isn't that the point?

Yusuf Iqbal

There's definitely something to be said for just sitting back and playing your games, rather than eternally searching for the optimum play environment. Still, some things are just inherently better, and we would find it quite hard to go back to slow, bordered games or fuzzy RF connections. It's okay to enjoy that, just as it's okay to not worry about those things. If someone asks for your advice on improving their setup, by all means provide it, but otherwise just remember that there's no definitive or 'correct' way to enjoy retro games.



» We staged this photograph specifically to annoy retro gaming snobs, and Nick started foaming at the mouth.

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of the movie's existence when I read a review of it in our college newspaper. Might I suggest another classic gaming competition film to your readers? *Ecstasy Of Order* from 2011 is an excellent look at people preparing for the (NES) *Tetris World Championship*. The movie also explores the backstory of the mysterious Thor Aackerlund, winner of the 1990 Nintendo World Championship event.

A few years ago, I saw a screening of the film at the Portland Retro Gaming Expo, which has also been the venue for the *Tetris* championship in recent years. I can attest that both the competition and the convention itself are awesome and well worth the trip.

PS: Readers in search of even more arcade competition docs should check out *The Way Of The Puck* on competitive air hockey.

Michael Bentley

Thanks for the recommendation, Michael. We're quite interested in the idea of a documentary based around competitive *Tetris*, if only because of the recent *Puyo Puyo Tetris* battles in the office.

PLAY ON

Dear **Retro Gamer** team,

Thank you, thank you, *thank you* for bringing back **Super Play**! I loved the magazine back in the Nineties and this return was everything I could have wanted, right down to the Wil Overton cover art and the return of old writers. I'm not sure I'd agree that *F-Zero* is only worth 77%, but I'll forget that because the mag made me feel like I was a teenager again. Will you be bringing back other mags like this? I'd love to see classic *CVG*, *Amiga Power* and *Mean Machines* back too. Make it happen!

Terry Delbridge

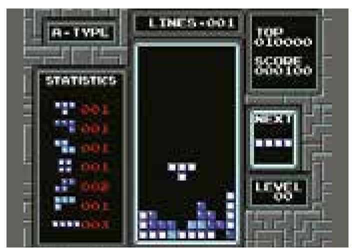
Glad to hear you liked Super Play! We're proud of our back catalogue, and you can be sure we're always on the lookout for the right opportunities to use it. As for *Mean Machines*, we don't own the rights – but we'd love to do it if we got the chance. Never say never!

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Mr Biffo's Found Footage

Is Paul Rose okay? That's what we were all wondering as our columnist's new YouTube series made its debut. Featuring the terrifying tea prancer, a joke-spouting robot and an advert for Scottish tourism that left us baffled, it is thoroughly bizarre viewing.





» [NES] Why does this game fascinate so many players? *Ecstasy Of Order* follows competitive players to find out.





From the forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

How well do you think Nintendo has handled the SNES Mini? Will you get one?

ncf1
I was fortunate enough to place an order within the half an hour they were available and was disgusted at first at how few they were releasing at launch given the success of the NES mini. But upon reflection I think its a stroke of genius, as they know the panic and chaos in the streets it will cause, creating an instant legend in the process that people will talk about and sell for exorbitant prices on Ebay for many years to come. Nintendo, I applaud you!

Antiriad2097
Am I getting one? Who knows? I have one on order, but whether that will actually be fulfilled is anyone's guess. It's farcical. I can't comprehend why Nintendo didn't just take orders and manufacture until those were issued. It's a licence to print money, and they don't want it.

RetroBob
I have two preordered – one from the first round and a second for a forum friend who wasn't online when another lot came up. Seems to be some mystery with how many will be produced – it's a shame to see scalpers trying to rip people off on eBay.

batman877
Yes, I preordered as soon as it was announced. The NES mini was amazing and this will be even better! Bring on the N64 Mini! In terms of availability… demand is higher than what Nintendo can produce; you could argue that they are a victim of their own success but people need to realise that this is just a niche product to it.

kiwimike
Have preordered from a usually very reliable supplier. As long as they aren't let down, neither will I. Got the Mini NES as well, didn't preorder but just saw it in a local store during one of the last runs after it was announced production was ceasing at the time. So I scraped in. But I would have thought with hindsight Nintendo would have learnt from that, the Mini SNES will be a scalpers paradise sadly.

Matt_B
I've love one to go with the NES Classic, but it's been nigh impossible to find anywhere in Australia that's kept their preorders open for long enough for me to put one in. I'll just have to cross my fingers and hope that Nintendo have a better handle on the demand this time around, and keep producing them for long enough to satisfy it.

RetroMartin
Won't be getting one due to the selection of games needing more collections of the same series. I think Nintendo has done a disservice for the way they've done the release as well as the number of units.

retro GAMER

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ENDGAME

LINK: THE FACES OF EVIL



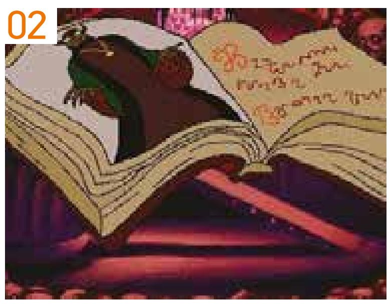
» Things are not well on the island of Koridai. The evil wizard Ganon and his minions have invaded the land, and according to the prophecy, King Harkinian's forces aren't going to be of any use – only Link can stop them. Can the hero survive countless enemies, hostile terrain and low-budget FMV to liberate this distant realm? Let's skip to the end of this infamous CD-i game and find out…

01



» Having heard that the written word holds far more power than conventional bladed weaponry, Link has set aside the Master Sword and instead armed himself with a copy of *My Booky Wook* by Russell Brand. He hoists the tome aloft…

02



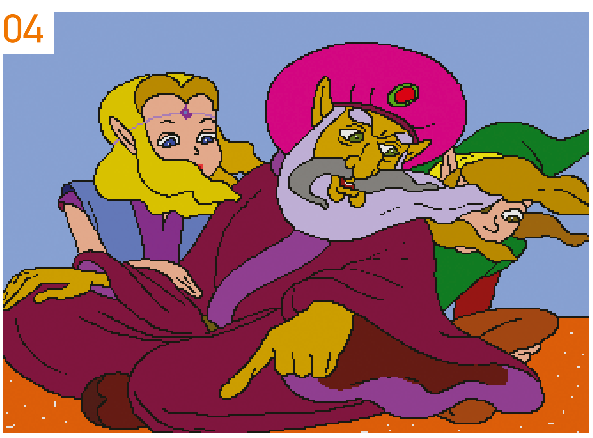
» … and throws it so hard that it absorbs Ganon completely, turning him into nothing more than a picture surrounded by total nonsense. It's an unconventional method of thwarting evil, but if it works, it's okay. Sadly, it all goes to Link's head.

03



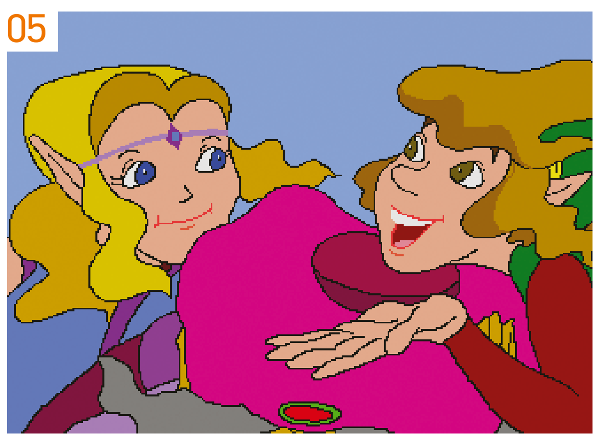
» With his newfound sense of entitlement, Link strikes a massive gong to wake up Zelda. Understandably miffed, the princess asks, "Why'd you do that, you twit?" The explanation that Link has just defeated Ganon is dismissed as a major fib.

04



» The wizard Gwonam shows up on his magic carpet, taking Link and Zelda on a trip to see how peace has been restored to Koridai. Link is declared the island's hero, which just causes his already enlarged ego to grow further. Despite the verification of his claims, Zelda is still unimpressed with Link.

05



» Link unilaterally decides that his efforts are "worth a kiss." Zelda disagrees. Even if her ears weren't still ringing from gong abuse, as a fan of the Stoics she believes that virtue should be its own reward. Hey Link: try to treat women as people, rather than rewards to be won, yeah?



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